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**Touchstone 3.1: Personality Development**

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Using what you have learned about the adolescent brain and social development, answer the questions in this case study assignment. Your goals are to help Monica understand why her son makes the choices he does and recommend some strategies that may help solve the problem. For each question, you should write a paragraph-length response (5–7 sentences) to receive credit for this assignment. You may use your Sophia tutorials as a resource.

**Question 1. What happens inside the brain of a teenager that makes it difficult for Jordan to weigh the risks and rewards of his behavior? Describe how the adolescent brain weighs risk and reward.**

The teenage brain is still developing, particularly the prefrontal cortex (PFC), responsible for planning, decision-making, self-control, and risk assessment. This part of the brain matures until the mid-20s, making it challenging for teenagers like Jordan to assess risks and rewards properly. During adolescence, the brain's reward system, including the ventral striatum and the nucleus accumbens, becomes highly active, leading to increased dopamine activity. This heightened dopamine makes risky behaviors and new experiences more appealing, reinforcing teenagers' tendency to seek short-term pleasures and peer approval.

Social factors also significantly impact teenagers. Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, and teenagers strongly seek social approval and a sense of belonging. Jordan's focus on his friends' opinions stems from this desire for social acceptance, which further activates the brain's reward system, motivating riskier behaviors. Additionally, teenagers have less developed emotional regulation, leading to intense emotional fluctuations and impulsive actions. Thus, the combination of an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex and an overly active reward system makes it difficult for the adolescent brain to evaluate risks and rewards accurately, explaining Jordan's risky behaviors.

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**2. Why does it appear that Jordan values the opinion of his peers more than the opinion of his mother? Explain the psychological concepts that may account for why Jordan places value on his peers’ opinions.**

Jordan values the opinion of his peers over his mother’s because of the unique psychological and social development that occurs during adolescence. This period corresponds to Erikson’s stage of "Identity vs. Role Confusion," where teenagers strive to form their self-identity and social identity. Peer approval and acceptance play crucial roles in this process, significantly impacting self-esteem and self-worth.

Peer pressure is particularly influential during adolescence. Teenagers are highly susceptible to the influence of their peers due to social motivation and the brain’s reward system. It is activated by social approval and positive evaluation, leading to feelings of pleasure. Consequently, Jordan prioritizes his friends' opinions and behaviors to gain their approval.

Social identity theory suggests that individuals define themselves by incorporating the characteristics and values of the groups they belong to. Jordan values his peers' opinions because he seeks to belong to their group and establish his identity as a member of that group.

Therefore, Jordan’s emphasis on his peers' opinions over his mother’s is a result of the interplay between identity formation, peer pressure, social approval needs, and the activation of the brain’s reward system. By seeking peer approval, he enhances his self-worth and strengthens his social connections.

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**3. What advice would you give Jordan’s mother, Monica, that would teach him how to make better choices and decisions? Discuss a specific strategy that Monica may implement to help her son make better decisions.**

To help Jordan make better choices, Monica should adopt an approach based on open communication and empathy. She should strive to understand Jordan's feelings and thoughts without blame, making him feel comfortable discussing his actions.

Here are specific strategies Monica can implement:

1. Establish Clear Rules and Expectations: Set clear rules and expectations for behavior and apply them consistently. Clear guidelines help Jordan understand what is expected of him.

2. Teach Problem-Solving Skills: Practice problem-solving with Jordan by discussing various situations and their outcomes, helping him develop good judgment.

3. Reinforce Positive Behavior: Recognize and praise Jordan for good choices, using specific compliments and rewards to encourage positive behavior.

4. Model Good Decision-Making: Demonstrate good decision-making and explain the reasoning behind her choices, providing a practical example for Jordan.

5. Support Emotional Regulation: Teach techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and exercise to help Jordan manage stress and emotions.

By implementing these strategies, Monica can create a supportive environment that helps Jordan make better decisions and fosters his growth and development.

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**4. If you were in Monica’s shoes, how would you feel? Explain why a better understanding of Monica's perspective could result in more constructive advice.**

If I were in Monica’s position, I would feel extremely worried and disappointed about my son's risky behavior. While concerned for his safety and future, I might also question my role and parenting methods. These feelings are natural responses for a parent and stem from a strong desire to protect and guide my child.

Understanding Monica’s perspective involves recognizing her emotions and concerns, and showing empathy towards her situation. Demonstrating empathy helps Monica feel understood and supported, reducing her stress and anxiety. This, in turn, prepares her to calmly assess the situation and accept constructive advice.

For instance, if Monica tries to understand the reasons behind her son’s behavior, communication between them may improve. By understanding the motivations and emotions driving his actions, Monica can respond more appropriately. Additionally, it is important for Monica to seek support herself, such as counseling or parent support groups, where she can receive advice and support from others with similar experiences.

Understanding Monica’s perspective allows for the provision of empathetic support and practical advice, enabling her to improve her relationship with her son and take appropriate actions to support his growth and development.

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