

Professor Sarah Jayne Blakemore

UCL

Adolescence as a sensitive period of brain development



Abstract

The brain has evolved to understand and interact with other people. This talk focuses on how the social brain, that is the network of brain regions involved in understanding others, develops during adolescence. Social cognitive processes involved in navigating an increasingly complex social world continue to develop throughout human adolescence. Areas of the social brain undergo significant reorganisation in terms of structure and function during the second decade of life, which possibly reflects a sensitive period for adapting to the social environment. The changes in social environment that occur during adolescence interact with increasing executive functions, heightened social sensitivity and the developing social brain to influence a number of adolescent behaviours, including risk-taking, peer influence and self-consciousness. This research suggests that adolescence represents a sensitive period of social brain development.