

Greatly expanding his award-winning New York Times series on the contemporary teen mental health crisis, Pulitzer Prize–winning science reporter Matt Richtel delivers a groundbreaking investigation into adolescence, the pivotal life stage undergoing profound—and often confounding—transformation. The transition from childhood to adulthood is a natural, evolution-honed cycle that now faces radical change and challenge. The adolescent brain, sculpted for this transition over eons of evolution, confronts a modern world that creates so much social pressure as to regularly exceed the capacities of the evolving mind. The problem comes as screen-based information pelts the brain just as adolescence is undergoing a second key change: puberty is hitting earlier. The result is a neurological mismatch between an ultrapotent environment and a still-maturing brain, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. It is a crisis that is part of modern life but can only be truly grasped through the broad, grounded lens of the biology of adolescence itself. Through this lens, Richtel shows us how adolescents can understand themselves, and how parents and educators can better help.

For decades, this transition to adulthood has been defined by hormonal shifts that trigger the onset of puberty. But Richtel takes us where science now understands so much of the action happens: the brain. A growing body of research that looks for the first time into budding adult neurobiology explains with untold clarity the emergence of the “social brain,” a craving for peer connection, and how the behaviors that follow pave the way for economic and social survival. This period necessarily involves rebellion—as the adolescent brain is programmed from birth to take risks and explore itself and its environment—so that adolescents may be able to thrive as they leave the insulated care of childhood.

Richtel, diving deeply into new research and gripping personal stories, offers accessible, scientifically grounded answers to the most pressing questions about generational change. What explains adolescent behaviors, risk-taking, reward-seeking, and the ongoing mental health crisis? How does adolescence shape the future of the species? What is the nature of adolescence itself?

MATT RICHEL is a health and science reporter at the New York Times. He spent nearly two years reporting on the teenage mental health crisis for the paper’s acclaimed multipart series Inner Pandemic, which won first place in public-health reporting from the Awards for Excellence in Health Care Journalism. He received the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting for a series of articles about distracted driving, which he expanded into his first nonfiction book, *A Deadly Wandering*, a New York Times bestseller. His second nonfiction book, *An Elegant Defense*, on the human immune system, was a national bestseller and chosen by Bill Gates for his annual Summer Reading List.

READ BY JOE KNEZEVICH

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