BEING A **TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY**

RISK-TAKING

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE SAFE RISKS

Risk-taking is an important aspect of adolescent development. We all experience this time in life where the thrill of the **'process'** outweighs the **'risks'** associated. So, how do we as adults help young people to take safe risks?

Risk-taking: Good or bad?

Risk-taking behaviour is a broad term that is sometimes mistaken as negative behaviours. It is important to understand though, not all risks are bad. For example, risks such as learning a new instrument, engaging in sports and travelling to school independently are risks we want to encourage young people to take. While risks such as drug use, unprotected sex, dangerous driving and vandalism are risks we do not want young people to engage in.

Young people taking risks is a critical component of their development. As they grow through their teenage years, they want to find their **own identity** and **differentiate** themselves from their carers. They do this by exploring the limits around them and testing their abilities to handle different situations independently. However, our brains typically do not fully mature until the age of 25 (some studies say 31!). This means young people's ability to **evaluate** risks and consequences, and to **manage** their impulsivity is likely to need support from the adults around them so they remain safe.

Risk-taking is a **natural and instinctive** drive, so simply inhibiting a young person's drive to take risks is likely to result in minimal success. Instead, carers need to be **creative** in how they support young people to take safe risks and demonstrate alternative ways to satisfy the young person's natural drive.

What carers can do

Here are some things you can do to encourage positive risk-taking.

Redirect energy.
Look for ways you can redirect a young person's energy into taking positive risks that support healthy development. For example, if the young person enjoys driving, take them go-carting or set up birthday parties at these facilities.

Change your language.
When addressing negative risk-taking behaviours, switch the focus from the negative to the positive. For example, instead of saying, 'Taking drugs is bad for your health', try highlighting the benefits to the young person in abstaining from substance use.

Encourage reflection on values.
Use the values in a young person's life (whether home or school values) to identify and suggest tolerable risks. For example, if a value at home is being adventurous, you could encourage the young person to take up a physical challenge, like rock climbing, mountain biking or a triathlon, or even to try out something new.

Don't threaten your relationship.
Don't use your relationship as a bargaining chip for negotiation with the young person. Often adults have the tendency to 'threaten' young people by saying they do not care for them anymore as a way to inhibit the young person's risk-taking behaviour. This approach is likely to damage your relationship with the young person rather than support them to take positive risks.

LEARN MORE

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:
> Siegel, D. (2013). *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain*. New York: Penguin Group.
> Source images: Freepik.com (Freepik, brgfx)

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