



Healthy Risk Taking

By guiding your teen toward healthy challenges, you can help them satisfy a desire for risk-taking, avoid negative consequences and bolster their confidence and leadership skills.

The benefits of healthy risk taking

Teenagers engage in risk-taking behaviors to find out who they are, not necessarily to be rebellious or intentionally disobey their parents. Most parents are terrified at the thought of their teenagers taking risks, but that's because many parents think of teen risk-taking as binge drinking, using drugs, vaping or other potentially dangerous behaviors. But risk taking is not always a negative thing, and healthy risk taking can actually build confidence and help strengthen leadership skills among teens.

Healthy risk taking doesn't put your child in danger, but it does require them to risk something — such as failure or criticism.

Taking risks is a natural part of teens' identity development and helps them figure out who they are, while they are exploring boundaries. In the process of taking healthy risks, they'll gain confidence, courage, and the ability to make plans and resist impulses — all important skills they'll need in life. Most parents understand that when they teach their child to ride a bike, there's a good chance that their child will end up with a skinned knee — but that risk is worth the reward of motor skills, confidence and self-esteem that come with learning to ride. That's exactly what healthy risk taking is all about.

Identifying healthy risks

Most teens are full of enthusiasm, but may have a hard time expressing that energy in a safe way. Brainstorming can help them find the right, meaningful and challenging activity and a way to direct their interests toward an exciting but healthy outlet.

A few questions to help start the conversation:

- What makes you the happiest?
- To you, what's the most valuable thing in the world?
- What's the most exciting thing you've ever done or can imagine doing?
- If you had a whole day to do whatever you wanted, what would you do?
- Is it a physical thing, like sports, that makes you happy? A creative one, like drawing or playing guitar? An emotional one, like volunteering at an animal shelter?

Once you know more about what your child finds exciting, you can look for healthy challenges that produce the same feeling. As your teen settles on an activity, asking simple questions is a great way to help them get going with the idea:

- How much time do you want to dedicate to this activity?
- How will you get there?

- What equipment or tools will you need?
- Who should you contact?

If they get off track, don't just jump in and take over — giving them too much help negates the whole learning experience and their sense of taking on a risk or challenge. Let them navigate through the process of getting started, and then follow up on how they're feeling about the activity itself.

If they are hesitant to try something new, talk about your own healthy risk-taking — and your failures — with them. Be sure to model the behavior you want to see in your teen so they have an example set for them (whether they realize or admit to it or not, teens tend to emulate their parents).

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