

HEALTHY RISK TAKING FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Have you ever wondered what healthy risk taking is? And, how do you as a parent or one in a parenting role support healthy risk taking and help your child or teen avoid taking unhealthy risks?

Risk taking is a normal part of child and adolescent development. Unhealthy risks are those that can result in serious and long-term consequences. Children and teens are more likely to take risks than adults because different parts of their brain are maturing at different times. Risk taking is an essential part of identity development.

- Risk taking is about a child or teen finding out who they are and exploring boundaries.
- Risk taking is not about a child or teen being rebellious.

Ways to Support Healthy Risk Taking

Provide healthy options and alternatives

- Roller coasters, thrill rides, and indoor rock climbing
- Run for office at school, try out for a team or a play
- Try new activities, even as a family or with a group
- Meet new people, join a club or volunteer
- Any activities that create excitement without the potential for unhealthy consequences

Model and label positive behavior because your behavior influences your child or teen

Discuss with your child or teen the positive behaviors you choose and why.

- If you take a risk that you do not want your child or teen to take, acknowledge it: *"I realize that I just drove in an aggressive manner. It was risky and I put us in harm's way."*
- Apologize for the decision, talk with your child or teen about why it was risky and why you regret doing it, and discuss how you would do things differently next time.



Talk with your child or teen about risk taking and healthy decision making

Engage your child or teen in a conversation and hear their point of view.

- *“In the movie we just watched, what did you think of the decisions the main character made?”*
- *“When your friends ask you to do something you are not comfortable doing, how do you handle it?”*
- *“I am struggling to understand the decision you made. Can you help me get a better sense of what went into your decision?”*

Develop deep social support systems

- Involve your child or teen in your community and support healthy relationships between your child or teen and the social support around you.
- Social support systems can include friends, family, faith communities, after-school activities, sports leagues, etc.

Grow family connectedness to reduce risk taking

Be responsive to your child’s or teen’s needs, model listening while interacting with your child or teen, share about their day over a meal, involve your child or teen in decision making, and set rules and expectations.

- Involve your child or teen in family decisions and rule setting.
- This might sound like:
 - *“What are some ideas you have about what we should do today?”*
 - *“I have some thoughts about curfew times, but I want to hear your thoughts before making a decision.”*
 - *“Let’s create this chore list together.”*

Monitor and stay involved

Know where your child or teen is. Check if they are where they say they will be.

It can be as simple as a phone call – “Hi honey, just checking to see how things are going” or a phone call to the parents of the friend they are with – “Hi, just checking to see how my child is doing at your house.”

Learn about all this and more by visiting ParentingMontana.org



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