



THE RIGHT KIND OF RISKS

if it seems like middle schoolers take a lot of crazy risks, it's probably true. It's only natural: a teenager's brain craves excitement and drama. The best way to feed that craving is to teach them how to distinguish between healthy risk and dangerous risk. Once they know the difference, encourage them to take healthy and exciting risks.



INTRODUCTION

Today we're going to talk about taking risks. Instead of me telling you about different kinds of risk, we're going to start off with a friendly debate.

Teacher Tip

This lesson works best when taught after "Blame it on the Brain"

Materials

Box of Fear (a cardboard box or shoe box you decorate with question marks)

Index Cards

WORKING OUT

Divide the boys into two equal teams and send them to separate sides of the room.

Assign the following roles to boys in each group.

Team A will argue the point: It is good to be a risk taker.

Team B will argue the point: It is bad to be a risk taker.

ROLES PER TEAM:

Spokesperson (1 boy)

The spokesperson will decide on a team name and introduce the team and their point to the class before the debate begins.

Writer (3 boys)

The writers will record the ideas on note cards for the speakers. Each team must come up with three ideas to support their point. They must include examples to support each of their points.

Speaker (3 boys)

The speakers will present the ideas to the opposing team.

Timekeeper (1 boy)

The timekeeper will watch the clock to make sure none of the speakers go over time.

Recorders (2 + boys)

The recorder will take notes on the other team's key points so that they can prepare a rebuttal.

RULES:

Everyone must respect the debate forum. No one can interrupt a speaker.

Each team must make three points and use a different example for each point.

No speaker can talk longer than 60 seconds to make a point.

Each team gets a chance for rebuttal. (This is the ONLY time to argue against what the other team said.)

DEBATE FORMAT:

Teams prepare for the debate. Flip a coin to see who will go first.

The spokesperson introduces the first team name and the point they are arguing.

Each speaker speaks for 60 seconds or less. Recorders from the opposing team take notes. Everyone claps for the first team.

Repeat for the second team.

Give each team time to prepare for rebuttal.

Speakers from the first team get 30 seconds each to argue against the other team's points.

Speakers from the second team get 30 seconds each to argue against the other team's points.

Everyone claps and circles up to discuss the debate.

HANGING OUT

Who do you think won the debate? Why?

Which points made the most sense to you?

Does anyone have an example of a time you took a risk and it paid off?

Does anyone have an example of a time you took a risk and it didn't pay off?

Do girls or boys take bigger risks?

Explain to the boys that it can feel exhilarating to take a risk but it is important to know the difference between good and bad risks.

Because your brain is still operating in its emotional center (remember what we learned last time?), it can feel good to take risks. It washes your brain in a chemical and gives you a euphoric feeling. But unless you develop the ability to distinguish between positive and negative risks, your risk can end with terrible consequences. Taking positive risks feels better than taking negative risks because there is no guilt or shame involved so aim for these.

A good risk is a protected risk. It can make you a better person you overcome a fear or challenge.

A bad risk is an unprotected risk. It can be dangerous or have terrible consequences.

To help decide if a risk is protected, see if:

- A trusted adult is aware of the risk you're going to take (EX: a coach, lifeguard, parent, teacher)
- Your body will be safe
- You will feel proud of yourself for doing this
- The people you love and respect will feel proud of you for doing this
- It will be hard but it will make you a better person

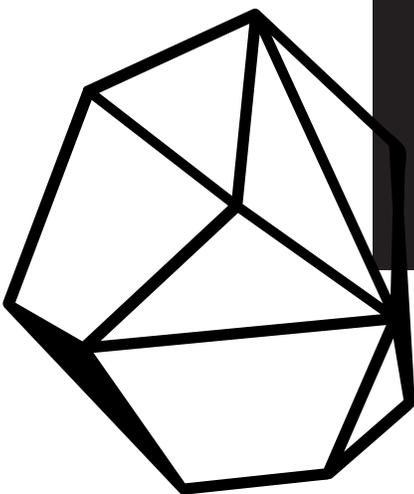
To help decide if a risk is unprotected, see if:

- No one is around to help you if you get hurt
- Your body would not be safe
- You could end up hurting someone else's feelings or body
- You could feel guilty, ashamed or embarrassed
- You would not want the people you love and respect to find out
- You would be breaking a law

As a class make two lists on the board. Label one Protected Risks and the other Unprotected Risks. Brainstorm for each.

Teacher Tip

Don't let boys get carried away with silly unprotected risks that aren't relevant to their lives... like robbing a bank. Look for diverse and relevant examples. If your boys don't come up with many examples, you can share the following list with them.



PROTECTED RISKS

UNPROTECTED RISKS

Running for office at your school	Using someone's screen name to spread gossip
Joining a club	Running away
Talking with someone new	Trying an illegal substance
Trying a new sport	Cheating on a test
Organizing a protest	Shoplifting
Starting a business	Starting a rumor
Sticking up for someone who is being teased	Breaking curfew
Writing a letter to someone famous you admire and tell them why	Skipping school
Taking harder classes at school	Engaging in unwanted intimacy
Facing a fear head on	Fighting
Participating in the talent show	Pushing yourself in sports without a coach's guidance
Auditioning for a commercial	Engaging in violence
Volunteering at a charity	Cutting yourself
Sky diving, Scuba diving, Training for a marathon, etc.	Taking an unsafe dare

Talk about the thrill you can get from taking protected risks. Biologically, your brain doesn't know the difference between healthy and unhealthy risks. Taking protected risks gives your brain the same jolt of excitement that taking dangerous risks does. You can still get that adrenaline rush without ending up in the ER.

WORKING OUT

The Box of Fear: Pass out index cards to everyone and ask them to write down the thing that scares them the most in the world. This is anonymous – no names!

Ask each boy to fold her card and drop it in the Box of Fear.

Everyone takes a turn pulling a card out of the Box of Fear. Each boy will read a card out loud and then explain to the class why this would be a real fear for someone.

Resolve this lesson with tips to tackle fear. Give everyone time to do step 2 on their own. Maybe some of the boys will be willing to share their fear and the steps they will take to overcome it.

1. Say out loud what you're afraid of
2. List goals and actions to overcome your fear
3. Test your fear (push fear back) by taking small steps
4. Visualize your success

