

Boys and Risky Behaviour: Why do they do it and what can we do to help?

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June, 2008

Are students more risky?

| CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey | 1995 | 2005 |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Drive a car impaired | 18% | 9.9% |
| High School students carry gun | 10% | 5.4% |
| carry weapon | 23% | 18.5% |
| Attempt suicide | 18% | 8.4% |
| Daily cigarette use | 29% | 13.2% |
| Ever drank alcohol | 81% | 74.3% |
| Binge drink (5+ at one time) | 31% | 25.5% |
| Ever had sex | 44% | 46.8% |
| Had sex with more than 4 partners | 22.6% | 14.3% |
| Used a condom | 58% | 62.8% |

If risk is down, what are they doing?

- Over one-third of high school students watch TV for three or more hours per day
- Over one-fifth of high school students are on the Internet or playing video games three or more hours per day
- i-Pod did not exist 10 years ago, nor did the huge number of music, movie, and game downloads
- Homework – +10 hrs/week by boys
 - 1980 – 6% 2002 – 33% (girls – 41%)

Why do we *think* boys are so risky?

- Media
 - Culture of fear
- Movies and video games
- They are inside
 - In the past they were outside
 - Expect to be entertained
- Culture now defines normal boy behavior as abnormal, dangerous, and risky
 - Girl behavior is seen as the norm
 - Roughhousing is seen as “fighting” in school

Neurocognitive source for risk

- Amygdala
 - Probably source of emotions
 - Develops early in boys
 - Not well connected to verbal center
- Brain
 - Prefrontal Lobes
 - Executive decisions, control impulses
 - Males require more energy to inhibit
 - Late development
 - At least not before 20 and maybe not until 30

Cultural source for risk

- Boys will be boys
 - For young boys, approval of risky behaviour
- Macho image of males
 - Different depending on the cultural background
- Tacit approval of alcohol and drug use
- Availability of cars and motorcycles
- Being abused or witnessing abuse
- TV shows on extreme sports
- Peer pressure

Parental source for risk

- Parents engage in more risky behaviour especially drugs and alcohol
- Parenting style
 - Permissive style → acting out to get attention from parents also lack of supervision
 - Authoritarian - unreasonable boundaries, but does provide guidelines and supervision
 - Authoritative - reasonable boundaries
- Lack of attachment to parents
- Helicopter parents – child does not learn independent behavior

Should schools get involved?

- Do we want to? – is there a real problem or is this a place where parents are abdicating their responsibilities?
- Does risky behaviour interfere with boys' education?
 - Impulsivity
 - Drugs and alcohol
- Can we intercede between parents and child or between peer group and child?
- Are there good reasons for risky behaviour?
 - Nobel Prize research

Barriers to Intellectual Risk

- National Standard Exams
 - Set curriculum
 - Standards for school success based on student performance
- Emphasis on education as basis for success
- Parental pressure to do well – country club phenomenon
- Idea that students should decide their life's work at 17
- Societal pressure that academic success = safety

Part of the solution:
Increase Intellectual Risk

- Open ended lessons
 - Labs, not cooking demonstrations
- Academic challenge/competitions
 - Odyssey of the Mind, Battle of the Brains, Geography Bee,
- Emphasis on cooperative learning
 - All students work on different projects and share results
- Challenge students to come up with novel solutions and approaches – give extra credit

Teach boys to evaluate risk

- Carson's B/WA formula
 - What is the *best* thing that can happen if I *do* this?
 - What is the *worst* thing that can happen if I *do* this?
 - What is the *best* thing that can happen if I *don't* do it?
 - What is the *worst* thing that can happen if I *don't* do it?
 - Other factors:
 - Who - B/WA from your viewpoint and from others'
 - What – is the action
 - Where – are you going, are you now, will you start?
 - When – does this start
 - How – once other questions are answered, then this
 - Why – the biggest question
- Carson, B.(2008) Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Management strategies – elementary schools

- Educate parents
- Playground equipment: select for interest
 - Include climbing, swinging, tunneling, balancing
 - Throwing objects – Frisbees, soft balls (Nerf)
 - Games – dodge ball, kickball, four square
 - Play games without adult interference
- Reality projects
 - Woodworking, gardening → use real tools
- Outdoor lessons – wilding
 - Ecology habitat construction/study

Management strategies – middle schools

- Need a large amount of exercise
 - Sports that involve a lot of running - track, soccer, basketball, tennis
 - Swimming and wrestling
- “Real” work develops responsibility – work crews, volunteer,
- Outdoor education
 - Fort building, trail development and maintenance, team building
- Independent projects – stress importance of individual thought

Management strategies – high schools

- Outdoor programs – climbing, ropes, kayaking, swimming
- Academic risk – encourage exploration, not memorization
 - Independent projects in all classes
- Performance – music, theater, art
- Encourage creative solutions to problems
- Introduction to the world – internships, shadowing, Habitat for Humanity
- Leadership opportunities

Use risk don't lose it

- Rewards for academic risk
 - Renown research
 - Independent thought
- Risk is how boys interact with their world and without risk, they become disinterested
- Schools can provide avenues for boys to explore risky approaches in a somewhat safe environment
- Boys are only engaged when there is some risk involved, so plan for it
