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

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## Are students more risky?

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

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