

Risky behaviour

Good personal and social skills include: making and acting on accurate judgements about risk, decision-making, negotiating, and managing influences and pressures. Developing the right skills is crucial, as even with the best information young people cannot use it if they do not have well-developed personal and social skills. Taking risks and testing boundaries is an important part of growing up. For many, risk-taking is a way of finding out who they are and who they want to be as well as part of the process of developing their own boundaries and values (Lynch and Blake 2004).

We need to understand risk within the context of young people's lives and recognise that for them the perceived benefits may outweigh the potential health risks. For example, to a young person, the benefit gained from stealing a pair of trainers may outweigh the risk of getting caught. Emphasising the development young people's skills of risk assessment (emotional and physical costs and benefits) and risk management are needed to enable them to think about, understand and manage the risks they take.

Some young people are particularly vulnerable to negative risk-taking, such as, substance misuse and early sexual activity, as a result of difficult life experiences including: socio-economic disadvantage, poor experience of public care, low self-esteem, sexual abuse or exploitation, exclusion from school and involvement with the youth justice system. Although many vulnerable young people appear knowledgeable and confident the reality is often quite different. They need additional and probably targeted education and support to help develop self-esteem and respect for themselves and others.

We must look beyond the immediate behaviours and understand the reasons why young people take risks, and use this understanding to inform the development of effective education, services and support.

The following activities encourage young people to think through some of the complex issues involved in risk-taking in an impersonal and non-threatening way through scenarios and role-play.

Table 2: Examples of risky behaviours and influences

Risk-taking behaviour		Influences	
Smoking	Setting off fireworks	Peer pressure	Family background
Taking Drugs	Bullying	Media	Physical ability
Drinking	Eating disorders	Opportunities	tradition
Unprotected sex	Drink-driving	Culture	Religion
Stealing	Under-age sex	Social Status	Isolation
Running away from home		Excitement	ulnerability
Truantiing from school		Sexuality	Personality
		Gender	
		Things that have happened to us	
		How we feel about ourselves	

Learning outcomes

Young people will:

- develop a greater understanding of risk-taking behaviour (Activity 11, Activity 12)
- have the opportunity to think through consequences and develop strategies to help them manage risk (Activity 13).

You will need

- flip chart
- paper
- pens
- A4 paper
- blue tack
- art materials
- one copy per small group of Worksheet 10: *Risk scenarios*
- one copy per small group of Worksheet 11: *Consequences*
- leaflets, posters, newspapers or magazine articles giving warnings (for example, of the risks of smoking and drinking).

Suggested icebreakers:

A risky situation I saw on TV was...

(See page 20)



Activity 11: **Risky business**

1. Either in small groups or as one large group, brainstorm on a large piece of paper the different types of risks people take. This could be done by writing, drawing or cutting out pictures from magazines. Examples might include those listed in Table 2. Encourage young people to discuss why their chosen activities are risky.
2. In small groups or as one large group, ask the young people to think about why people take risks and to make a list of these reasons. Examples might include peer pressure, drinking alcohol and other drugs, the need for excitement or a buzz, poor self-esteem, showing off, thinking 'it won't happen to me', living for the moment.
3. Raise the subject of 'pressure' and explore with the group where pressures come from and strategies for resisting them.

Reflection

Why do some young people take more risks than others?

When might there be a positive outcome from taking risks

When might there be a negative outcome from taking risks?

How do you decide if a risk is worth taking?

What planning needs to be in place?



Activity 12: **Spread the word**

1. In small groups, ask the young people to design an advertising campaign that explains how alcohol and other drugs can increase risk-taking behaviour. Risks may include driving unsafely, having unsafe sex or sex they regret, or setting off fireworks.
2. Using the arts materials, ask them to create a poster or leaflet for parents/peers for the campaign.
3. Invite the groups to display the posters explaining their ideas and what the message is.
4. Identify somewhere for all the campaigns to be displayed where more people can see them.

Reflection

What advice would you give a friend who had to make a decision that involved risk?

What new information have you learned today?

How will you use the information that you have learned?



Activity 13: ***What happens next?***

1. Divide the young people into groups and give each group one or two scenario cards from Worksheet 10 and a copy of Worksheet 11.
2. Using Worksheet 11 ask the young people to think through what they would do in each situation and why. Note that group members may have different answers to questions 5 and 6 of the worksheet.
3. Ask each group to prepare a short role-play for feedback.
4. Back in the whole group, ask participants to share their scenario and their answers. Invite the groups to either show their role-play or explain their thoughts about the scenario using Worksheet 11 as a guide.

Reflection

What things did you take into account when making the decision?

Were some decisions more risky than others – which ones, and why?

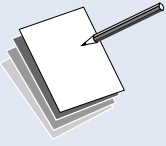
Is there such a thing as a 'right decision'?

Do you think we all see and take risks in the same way or are some people more reckless/cautious than others?

Does it make a difference if the decision affects others?

If there is a good outcome such as a 'buzz or a high' in the short term, do you think people think about the long term?

How will you use the information and skills that you have learned?



Worksheet 10: Risk scenarios

You go to a party with a new group of friends. During the party you are offered some drugs. What do you do?

The group you hang around with have started shoplifting. They reckon it's a great laugh and show you all the CDs they've got. They want you to go with them next time. What do you do?

You're on holiday and you're leaving the next day. You've just spent the evening with the boy/girl you've been fancying all week. You both had a great time. Back in your room things are getting very passionate. No one's mentioned condoms and you didn't bring any out with you. What do you do?

You're about to leave a party with a few of your friends. You've all had a good time but it's getting late and you've got a long walk. You get offered a lift with a couple of people leaving at the same time. You know the driver is well over the limit. What do you do?

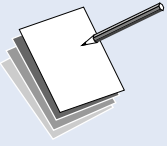
You've been going out with Tom for a while now and things are going well. You are not ready to have sex with him yet. One night at a party you both go upstairs and one thing leads to another. You are in a bedroom and things are going too far. What do you do and why?

You've been going out with Sarah for a while now and things are going well. You are not ready to have sex with her yet. One night at a party you both go upstairs and one thing leads to another. You are in a bedroom and things are going too far. What do you do and why?

You are at a party and decide you want to go home. No one else wants to leave yet. What do you do and why?

You and your partner have always used a condom when you've had sex. Now your partner says it is OK not to use them. What do you do?

You've been hanging out in the park all evening with your mates. It's 1am and someone suggests letting off some fireworks. What do you do?



Worksheet 11: Consequences

1. What are your options?

2. What are the risks?

3. What feelings might you be experiencing in this situation?

4. How might these feelings affect your decision?

5. What would your decision be and why?

6. If you had been drinking in exactly the same situation would your decision be any different?