



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 31 – October 15, 2008 – Sensation Seeking

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In a culture where the “extreme” seems to be the norm, our kids are faced with tough decisions everyday. We are all familiar with risky behaviors, actions such as drinking and driving, stealing, fighting, or engaging in risky sex. As parents, many of us are good at talking with our kids about such behaviors. We set guidelines about underage drinking and talk about illegal behaviors, but what we sometimes miss is talking with our kids about their desire to take risks and how to make them safe and positive.

Positive risks can help kids grow. Taking a risk means doing something when you don’t know how it will turn out. Positive risks include trying new things like rock climbing or snow boarding, meeting new friends, or applying for a job. Positive risks are actions that give us an inner sensation of uncertainty and a good feeling when successful. Kids in early adolescence seem to be hard wired to be sensation seekers. Youth in our area score very near the state and national average in sensation seeking behaviors according to the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (2005).

Knowing that adolescents are risk takers, parents need to strive to teach kids to think before taking risks. Teach them to ask themselves, “What’s in it for me? What positive things might happen?” We also want our kids to look at what could go wrong. Teach them to ask themselves, “Could I get hurt? Could someone else?” A risk is worth taking when it helps a kid grow emotionally or physically, when it doesn’t hurt anyone, and when it makes them feel good about themselves.

Many of our kids fall into the trap of thinking, “It won’t happen to me.” This thought process can lead kids to take unsafe risks. Healthy kids can be realistic about possible outcomes and withstand pressure when faced with decisions about risky behaviors.

As adults, we need to talk with our kids about alcohol and drugs and let them know that using them is not worth the risk. Negative consequences such as illness, overdose, addiction, crime, risky sexual behaviors, and accidents are all more likely to result when alcohol and drugs are involved.

The risks that face our kids today are real. Kids need to have an outlet to fulfill their need for sensation in a positive way. Talk with your kids about what they like to do for fun. Help them learn how to think through possible outcomes and make healthy choices. Rock climbing, skiing, hiking, bike riding, white water rafting, and high ropes courses are examples of sensation seeking activities that if done correctly can be safe. If your kids are not interested in athletics or other physical activities, try engaging them in new clubs where they can meet new friends and community members. The desire to experience the unknown and seek new sensations can be achieved through any number of positive activities and kids can be safe too!

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