**Why Kids Need to Take Risks**

**Source:** [www.verywellfamily.com](http://www.verywellfamily.com)

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When you keep your kids from taking risks, you are taking a risk of your own—with your child's health. Research shows that one way kids grow and learn is by having permission and opportunities to venture into the unknown: to climb high, wander independently, use grown-up tools, and bike down a hill as fast as they can.

While it's natural to want to keep your child safe, the chance of injuries may actually be worth it in exchange for emotional and physical confidence. Thankfully, the great majority of injuries sustained during risky outdoor play are minor, requiring little or no medical treatment.

**Risk-Taking Promotes Physical Health**

Most childhood risk-taking involves at least some physical activity, whether it is walking to school or the park alone, climbing a tree, or trying new skateboard tricks. Prohibiting or discouraging risks can reduce the amount of physical activity your child is getting.

This is important when you consider how much time your child spends each day being active. The great majority of kids—a whopping 76%—aren't getting the minimum 60 minutes of daily active play that they need.

Take a look at the types of risky behavior identified by one child development researcher (who observed kids at playgrounds in three countries):

* Play at heights
* Play at high speeds
* Play with tools
* Play near dangerous elements (such as water or fire)

Rough-and-tumble play (such as wrestling)

Wandering away from adult supervision

Most of these activities challenge and strengthen kids' muscles, bones, hearts, and lungs—and that's a good thing. Does the thrill of height or speed get your child moving? Embrace it with both free play (such as at the playground or riding a bike) and organized sports (such as skiing, skating, or martial arts).

**Emotional Health Benefits**

To gain confidence, kids need to try big, scary things. They need to see that even if they fail, they can try again. Eventually, they will master a new skill and gain the positive self-esteem that comes with it. That mastery is more meaningful if the stakes are higher—if there is a bigger risk of failure or even injury.

It might take days or months for some kids to make it to the top of the obstacle. By taking their time, they are actually reducing their own risk instinctively.

They are overcoming their fears little by little. This means practicing persistence and resilience, too, both of which are important life skills that we all want our kids to have.

When kids are active and change position a lot—such as swinging high on a swing or dangling upside-down from the monkey bars—they are developing their vestibular system. And surprisingly, that system helps kids regulate their emotions and even pay attention at school.

**Social Benefits of Taking Risks**

Along with contributing to physical and emotional health, free play benefits kids' social development as they navigate risks. One review notes that unstructured play promotes children's understanding of social norms and how to follow rules.

Finally, risk-taking in a group setting helps kids learn self-control as they take turns and work with others. Reaching these crucial steps in social development is vital before children mature into adults, when they will use those same skills in their relationships and workplace.

The importance of proper social-emotional growth can't be overstated. The authors of a 2015 study showed that social and emotional health in kindergarteners predicted their success (or lack thereof) into young adulthood across multiple areas including education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health.

**Obstacles to Risk-Taking**

When promoting positive risk-taking in your kids, you may be faced with their reluctance or your own.

**Parents' Fears:**

If you're uncomfortable with your kids taking risks, think about why you feel this way. For example, you may be afraid your child will get hurt trying something new because you got hurt as a child.

In addition, consider the fact that peer pressure among parents is real and can profoundly influence your parenting decisions. If your friends don't allow their children to walk to school or try out the high playground equipment, you may gravitate toward those same limitations with your kids out of fear of what your peers will think.

These factors may or may not apply to you, but they are worth considering if you want to encourage your child to take more risks but feel ambivalent about taking that step.

**Children's Fears:**

On the other hand, you may be all for your child pushing their limits but encounter resistance on their part when you suggest trying something new. We all have different temperaments that influence our propensity for risk-taking.

If your child shows no interest in taking risks (however small), try talking to them about possible outcomes. This can help you figure out the best way to help them move a bit out of their comfort zone and see what they're capable of.

For instance, if your child is afraid of the slide because they're worried they might get hurt, suggest going down it with them. If they still aren't interested, you can suggest trying a smaller slide.