

Risk-taking behaviour

We have an expert team to support our students.

Our pastoral care team includes junior and senior deans, specialist guidance counsellors, and youth workers from Kahu Youth and 24-7.



MAC Health Education teacher Carys Overton

In Health Education, we teach our students about mental and emotional health, drug and alcohol awareness, sexuality, and care and physical safety so they are equipped to make informed decisions that support their wellbeing and help prevent negative risk-taking behaviour.



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What is risk-taking behaviour?

- A risk is a behaviour with an uncertain outcome.
- Risk-taking behaviour can be both positive and negative.
- Positive risk taking means a person can experience a feeling of uncertainty or fear but with a constructive and socially acceptable outcome. Examples include playing competitive sport, performing in a school play or band, motocross racing, big air, freeride mountain biking or participating in a maths or spelling competition.
- Negative risk-taking behaviour is when an activity can have harmful consequences for a young person's health, safety or wellbeing, or is illegal or socially unacceptable. Such behaviour can include vaping, underage drinking, chroming, shoplifting, dangerous driving and vandalism.
- Risk taking looks different for every child. Our students manage these situations well and have a high tolerance for risk taking.
- While the teenage brain can recognise risk, it can sometimes struggle to determine whether a risk is positive or negative.

Why do young people take risks?

- Taking risks and trying new things are essential for young people so they can discover who they are, build important life skills, and prepare themselves for adulthood.
- During adolescence, the area of the brain that handles impulse control and planning is not yet mature.
- This means young people are more likely to make quick and risky decisions.
- Young people may take risks when they are influenced by peer pressure or mental health issues, when they model what they see among family and friends, or when there is an absence of positive role models in their lives.

What we know about risk-taking behaviour

- Drinking alcohol and not getting enough sleep are both associated with more risk taking.
- Some types of risk taking are more likely to occur when young people have friends present. For example, research has found that adolescents are more likely than an adult to have a car accident when carrying a passenger.
- Research has also found that stress increases risky decision-making with negative emotional states, such as feeling threatened, influencing risk-taking behaviour.

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Tips for parents

- **Stay connected:** Find opportunities to connect with your teen. This will help keep the communication lines open.
- **Discuss consequences:** Help your child think about the consequences of different behaviours so they can understand how much risk is involved.
- **Talk openly about peer pressure:** Help your child find ways to handle the influence of their friends while saving face. For example, they could tell their friends that smoking gives them asthma.
- **Encourage safe but exciting experiences:** Hobbies such as outdoor pursuits and the creative arts are safe ways for a young person to take risks.
- **Balance trust and freedom:** If you rely too much on fear and authority, young people are more likely to rebel in order to gain some control. If you give your child too much freedom, they may feel unsupported.
- **Set boundaries:** Set boundaries that you can adapt with age. If you can give your child some areas in their lives where they are in control, they may be less likely to engage in harmful risk taking. If your child demonstrates they can be trusted and make good decisions, reward them with increased freedom.
- **Affirm your support:** While you may not always agree with the choices your child makes, let them know they can always rely on your support.

How we promote positive risk taking at school

- We **focus on student wellbeing** by building a [safe, caring and inclusive environment](#).
- In our Health Education course, **we equip our students to make informed decisions** that support their wellbeing and help prevent negative risk-taking behaviour.
- We **provide educational opportunities** for students and their whānau so they are well informed and can make smart choices. For example:
 - the [AJ Hackett bungy programme](#) to promote resilience
 - the [Loves-Me-Not programme](#) to prevent abusive behaviour in relationships
 - the [Blue Light Alternative Strategy for Teenagers \(BLAST\) programme](#) run by Wānaka Police comprising activities and workshops to help young people develop problem-solving skills
 - the [DARE programme](#) led by NZ Police aimed at reducing harm
 - the [Life Education Trust](#) programme to promote positive choices



Our team of guidance counsellors
Victoria Stewart, Michael Multhaup and Holly McDiarmid

How to contact our guidance counsellors

E: dept-guidance@mtaspiring.school.nz

T: 020 404 94623 or 03 443 0496



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