

Subtopic 2: Risks During Leisure Time

We have discussed that some risks are good, and we seek them out to get a thrill or for excitement. What kinds of leisure activities give us positive risks or challenges?

Write on the board:

Leisure: A Time of Risk and Opportunity

Have students discuss what they think this means. As we know, risk taking occurs throughout the day. As we've discussed, in free and leisure time, the possibilities of both positive and negative risk are high among teenagers because you have more freedom and more opportunities to make your own decisions.

What risks might take place in leisure time? [harm to self or others, vandalism, substance use, violence, etc.]

What opportunities? [remind students about the benefits, including social emotional learning, dealing with conflict, time for relaxing, to develop skills, opportunity to learn from mistakes, etc.]

Desiring a Positive Challenge

There are many things we do in leisure time because we want a challenge, and often to address the challenge we have to take positive risks.

Think back to Samson's situation: Samson is really very shy. But he really wants to be part of a drama group, so he auditions for a part in the play.

Taneesh had another type of challenge: Taneesh is finally getting a chance to play basketball with her friends. She has never been that good of a player, but they needed one more person for the team. At an important point in the game she gets the ball. She is surrounded by the other team, but she thinks she can make the basket so she shoots the ball. She knows her teammates are all looking at her.

In both of these situations, the person was taking a personal risk. It was a challenge. But in each case, the person had a positive self-image and a desire to pursue an interesting leisure activity.

Things that make leisure activities a positive challenge are when a person's skill level meets the challenge.

If there is too much challenge, a person becomes anxious and there might be negative consequences. Can you think of any examples? [In the case of Samson, for example, he might have gone for the audition, felt the competition was too high, and left and got drunk to overcome his anxiety.]

If there is not enough challenge, a person is likely to become bored. Can anyone think of an example? [In Taneesh's situation, if she had been a really good player, and everyone else was not as good, she might get bored and quit the team.] What are the consequences when someone gets bored?

Too much or too little challenge can happen in all parts of our lives. We need to be aware of this and make good decisions so that we can achieve the right balance between challenge and skill – it is easiest to do this in our free time because we have the most choice during this time. Therefore, choose your leisure activities to make sure you get the right amount of risk and challenge for you, and that you don't have to take negative risks in other aspects of your life.

Positive risk—"If I do this, my peers will accept me."

Negative risk—"If I do this, my parents will be disappointed."

You have to weigh those kinds of risk against each other, and make the right decision. What is the most important consequence in the short term and long term?

Other Discussion Topics

1. What clues in the environment might lead to deciding whether a risk is positive or negative?
2. Can the same risk behavior, e.g., [choose something that would resonate with your students], be positive in one situation and negative in the other?
3. What factors might be present to make the risk positive or negative? For example, when stressed or angry or in a heightened emotional state, one might react to a situation differently than if one was in control. Or, when one is with a social group where one is trying to maintain or gain status, there may be a heightened chance for risk taking than if one was alone or with a couple close friends they don't need to impress.
4. Talk about how being with peers has a major impact on good decision making as well as an increased likelihood of taking a risk that will have negative consequences.