



A cool tool to reduce teenage risk

by Michael Grose

Healthy teens generally want more freedom, while parents want to make sure their young people are safe. As young people grow and demonstrate the ability to make smart choices, it's a good idea to allow them more authority over their lives. Increasing independence involves greater freedom to choose, which demonstrates trust and faith in their ability to make good decisions.

Brain research shows that teenagers in the 13- to 18-year-old age group need help and guidance around decision making. The pleasure-seeking part of their brain tends to dominate the reasoning part of the brain during this stage – and later as well.

Safe, fair, smart

Here is a cool tool to prompt young people to make smart decisions, particularly when you are not around. Give your young person these three questions to ask themselves to help them assess the safety and suitability of any activity or behaviour that they are about to participate in:

- 1. Is it safe?** This question helps them to assess risk.
- 2. Is it fair?** This question helps them to be sociable and consider others.
- 3. Is it smart** (and in my long-term best interests)? This question encourages them to think ahead, which isn't a typical teenager's strong point.

The safe, fair, smart tool needs to be used often so that will sink in. My three adult children can now repeat these questions verbatim as they were directed at them often – regardless of the withering looks, raised eyebrows and shrugged shoulders that came my way.

Promoting independence in our adolescents is hard work for parents as we are always treading a fine line between being too protective and allowing young people more freedom. However, if young people

are to learn how to make smart choices, we adults need to equip them with the processes as well as the opportunities to do so.



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