

RETHINKING “RISK” IN HEALTH EDUCATION



A person can get hurt by taking risks. But that is not the whole story. Challenging ourselves and taking risks is also essential to growth, development and learning. Educational efforts that focus on warning about risk and promoting low-risk behaviours have generally proven ineffective. This approach also raises ethical concerns. Should we tell people how we think they ought to live? *iMinds* seeks to bring a more comprehensive approach to teaching about risks related to substance use and gambling.

* For discussion of the evidence see [Health education is education](#)

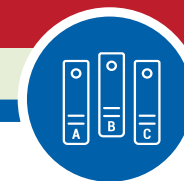
School-based programs addressing drug use or gambling often focus on the risks involved in such activities. *iMinds* takes a different approach. Here’s why.



- FOCUS** ▶ Health promotion
- GOAL** ▶ Resilience
- MEANS** ▶ Increase capacity for critical/caring thinking

ASSUMPTIONS & EVIDENCE*

- ▶ **RISK IS A PART OF LIFE**, and it is not possible, or even desirable, to avoid all risk. Many people even seek risk and enjoy activities that involve risk. People need to learn to manage risk in their lives effectively.
- ▶ **RISK AND HARM PLAY OUT WITHIN AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT**. Whether or not an individual’s decision to engage in “risky” behaviour leads to harm depends on many factors. People need to learn how to critically assess situations and make decisions based on knowledge and experience.
- ▶ **RISK FACTORS ALONE DO NOT PREDICT HARM**. Longitudinal studies demonstrate that even among the most “high-risk” children, only a minority develop serious problems. People should learn about risks but within a balanced and comprehensive approach to life management.
- ▶ **OFTEN, PEOPLE KNOW THE RISKS** associated with particular behaviours but make the choice to engage because of perceived benefits. People need to develop the capacity to assess both risks and benefits and make informed choices that advance their life goals.



- FOCUS** ▶ Prevention
- GOAL** ▶ Behaviour change
- MEANS** ▶ Provide messages about risk and healthy living

ASSUMPTIONS & EVIDENCE*

- ▶ **RISK CAN LEAD TO HARM**, and students need to be taught about risks and how to avoid them.
- ▶ **RISK IS LINKED TO INDIVIDUAL DECISIONS** that may be based on faulty beliefs or a lack of awareness. These errors and deficits need to be corrected.
- ▶ **RISK PREDICTS HARM**. Students who engage in risky behaviour are likely to experience significant harm and should therefore be helped to understand and mitigate the risks.
- ▶ **STUDENTS ARE UNAWARE OF MANY OF THE RISKS** involved in their behaviour. Warning students about the risks will help them make better decisions.



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