

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
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**Risky Business**

Do you take more chances when your friends are around?

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**What Happened:**

Everyone knows that teens sometimes make some bad decisions. It's a big reason why they're four times more likely than adults to have car wrecks and why insurance rates for new drivers are outrageously expensive.

That's not all. They sometimes drink (even though it's illegal), smoke (even though they know it's bad for them) and take a number of unnecessary risks. All those risks put teens in some very dangerous situations.

Here's the kicker: Teens are far more likely to take risks when other teens are around. For loads of scientists, that just made sense—particularly when it came to driving. If a driver's friends are talking and laughing in the back seat, chances are pretty good the driver's going to be distracted, right?

Turns out, though, there's something else at work here. New research by scientists at Temple University suggests teens take more risks when their friends are around because...well, they want to.

Temple watched how teens and adults performed in a driving simulator, judging how quickly they'd reach a virtual destination. They were particularly interested in how drivers would handle a particular yellow light: Running it might help drivers get to their destination faster; but they might get into an accident, too, which would significantly slow their time.

Researchers found that teens and adults drove pretty similarly when alone in the simulator, but when youth had friends in the simulator with them, they were far more likely to zip through that yellow light. Moreover, the teens' brains lit up in their rewards receptors, meaning that teens thought the upside of running the light rose when other teens were in the car with them. The teens weren't distracted—they simply thought running the light was the right—possibly cool—thing to do.

“Because adolescents find socializing so rewarding, we postulate that being with friends primes the reward system and makes teens pay more attention to the potential payoffs of a risky decision,” said Temple psychologist Laurence Steinberg.

**Talk About It:**

Do you think you make pretty good decisions? What about your friends? What's the craziest thing you've ever done? Who was with you?

Do you become more daring when your friends are around? Do you ever try to impress them by doing something you wouldn't ordinarily do? Do you sometimes feel when you're with your friends that you're a little more invincible than normal?

Do your friends sometimes encourage or dare you to do something you didn't really want to do? Do you typically do it? What about other kids you know? Do you know of anyone who's done something they really regretted afterward?

Sometimes, there are good reasons to take a risk. Can you think of a time when you took a chance and it turned out well for you? Did you ever decide *not* to do something, then wish you had done it?

**What the Bible Says:**

"Why do I put myself in jeopardy and take my life in my hands?" (Job 13:14).

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Prov. 13:20).

"Do not be misled; bad company corrupts good character. Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning" (1 Cor. 15:33).