

A cool tool to reduce teenage risk

Many parents think their teenagers are three years younger than they really are, while most teenagers think they are three years older than they are.

Finding middle ground can be hard work.

Teenagers generally want more freedom, while parents want to make sure their young people are safe.

As young people grow and show the ability to make smart choices – we need 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.

Young people often can't see the long-term consequences of their decisions so it helps to give them information to help them make smart choices.

Also brain research shows that teenagers in the 13-18 year 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.

Here is a **cool tool** to prompt young people to make smart decisions, particularly when you are not around. Give your young person this 3 question format 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 repeated often so that it will sink in. My three adult children can now repeat these questions verbatim as they were repeated often regardless of the withering looks, raised eyebrows and shrugged shoulders that went my way.

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

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