

### **Taking Reasonable Risks**

(This is the third in 4 articles on the “Four R’s” that we stress at Camp Champions)

As you might have seen in a previous article, we focus on the “Four R”s: showing Respect, taking reasonable Risks, Reaching out to others, and taking Responsibility. This article talks about what we do to stress taking reasonable risks.

In noted child psychiatrist Dr Lynn Ponton’s excellent book, The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do What They Do, she asserts that teenagers are “wired” to take risks and that this is a natural part of developing risk assessment skills. With this in mind, the challenge of parents and educators is to encourage “healthy risks”.

Dr. Ponton distinguishes between healthy risks (e.g., trying out for a team, performing music in front of an audience) and unhealthy risks (drinking, extreme dieting, teen pregnancies).

We recognize that camp is an ideal environment for taking healthy, reasonable risks. In fact, “Reasonable Risk-taking” is one of the 4 “R”s that we emphasize at camp (the others are Respect, Responsibility and Reaching Out).

At camp, we provide challenging, but safe risks for all ages of campers. For a first time camper, simply coming to camp and having fun away from home is form of taking a risk. Scaling our climbing wall is another great example. We encourage each camper to set a goal for the wall (i.e., “I will go halfway up”) and we work with them to meet and even exceed this goal. Being 30 feet up can be a little scary. It feels like a real risk, but it is in fact perfectly safe.

In fact, we attempt to craft activities that seem to suggest a bit more challenge and risk than is actually present. For example, we commit ourselves to making sure that every camper gets up on water-skis or a wakeboard. In some cases, this is on a “boom” using special skis, but we make sure every camper gets a taste of success. The risk the camper is taking in this example is dealing with a fear of failure. Many campers are convinced that they will be the one camper who fails to get up. Yet by the end of the summer, they have proven this fear wrong.

Taking reasonable risks extends beyond our scheduled daytime activities. Participating in a cabin skit, publicly acknowledging the acts of a counselor or fellow camper at Torchlight or even making a new friend are all forms of risk taking that help strengthen a camper’s capability while satisfying his or her need to engage in risk-taking.

For older campers, we focus even more on these challenges. Our senior high program is designed to challenge and stretch our campers. We want them to spend time out of their comfort zone, but to do so in a safe and healthy way.