

The Cyberlibrarian: Reviews and Views on Current Literature

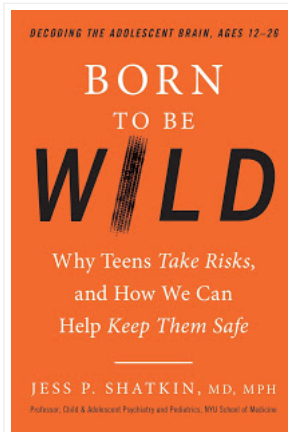
Welcome to my blog. I am Miriam Downey, the Cyberlibrarian. I am a retired librarian and a lifelong reader. I read and review books in four major genres: fiction, non-fiction, memoir and spiritual. My goal is to relate what I read to my life experience. I read books culled from reviews in The New York Times, The New York Review of Books, Bookmarks, and The New Yorker. I also accept books from authors and publicists. I am having a great time. Hope you will join me on the journey.

Tuesday, October 3, 2017

Born to be Wild: Why Teens Take Risks, and How We Can Help Keep Them Safe

by Jess P. Shatkin, MD
 TarcherPerigee 2017
 320 pages **Nonfiction**
The Shortlist

It was a warm night on Saturday of Labor Day weekend—four days before school was scheduled to start. A 15-year-old without a license drove his family car. His passengers included two girls and two boys, ages 15, 16, and 17. As the car picked up speed, a police car turned on its siren and started after them, but soon turned the siren off and slowed down. The kids were going too fast—more than 100 miles per hour. Suddenly, the car veered off the road and struck a tree. Before the police officers could reach them, the car exploded. All five occupants of the car died immediately. The community of Kalamazoo has been in mourning for a month now. My adopted granddaughter knew all five kids—one was a distant cousin.



As any parent of a tween, teen or 20-something knows, adolescents take risks. In fact, those aged 12–26 are hard-wired to take risks, but how do you combat these natural impulses? In *Born to Be Wild*, Jess Shatkin brings more than two decades' worth of research and clinical experience to the subject, along with cutting-edge findings from brain science, evolutionary psychology, game theory, and other disciplines -- plus a widely curious mind and the perspective of a concerned dad himself.

Dr. Shatkin illustrates in *Born to Be Wild* that:

- Adolescents are genetically engineered to prioritize emotions over logic: Teens make risky choices for social acceptance and to avoid emotional pain. If a peer is watching, even a peer they don't know, adolescents are more likely to take risks.
- Teens know that they're not invincible. In fact, studies have shown that, when teens engage in risky behavior, they often overestimate their chances of being harmed by that behavior.
- Improving parenting practices and increasing parent monitoring can help halt high-risk behaviors: Shatkin shares Parent Management Training (PMT) techniques that emphasize tactful praise over remonstrations of how not to behave.
- Supportive families benefit the brain: Studies show teens raised by parents with low levels of conflict in their homes have less demanding brain reward centers; these teens will engage in less risk-taking behavior because their interpersonal relationships are rewarding.

Ironically, even though adolescence is a risk-taking time, it is also a time of incredible potential. In *Born to Be Wild*, Shatkin shows what parents and teachers can do--in everyday interactions, teachable moments, and specially chosen activities and outings--to work with teens' need for risk, rewards and social acceptance, not against it.



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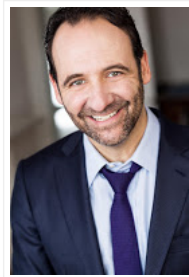
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Dr. Shatkin believes that the best way to reduce risk taking among adolescents is to focus on prevention before they hit their teen years. He also believes that a calm household, with calm rational parents, can reduce risk taking. I always believed in the "pick your battles" theory, believing that I didn't need to react to everything that my children and grandchildren did or said they were going to do—just the actions that would affect their safety, health, or well-being.

I can't answer the question of why those young people went on that joy ride. No one knows. That is a question that will go unanswered, but I do know that my adopted granddaughter decided that she would wait to get her driver's license until she was 18, rather than now, just after she finished drivers training. A wise decision.

Dr. Jess Shatkin has years of experience in child and adolescent mental health. *Born to Be Wild* is an extremely valuable book for parents, teachers, and others who work with teens and young adults. I can highly recommend it. I have several teenage grandchildren. Their parents will appreciate reading this thoughtful book.



Dr. Jess Shatkin website.

Posted by [Miriam Downey](#) at 10:28 PM

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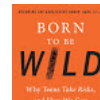
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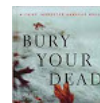
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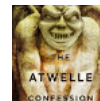
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About Me

Miriam Downey

Kalamazoo, Michigan

I am the wife of Thell, the mother of 3, the step-mother of 4 and grandmother to 8. Right now our family includes 22 people. I am a theological school-trained, career-long librarian. Having grown up in Minnesota, I am liberal to the core but married to a life-long Republican. We are great together except during political campaigns.

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