

Risk-taking in young chimps and teens is similar

15th January 2026



Teenagers are well known for doing crazy things. It seems that once a child becomes a teen, they take a lot more risks. Some of these are dangerous and lead to injury, or worse. A new study of young chimpanzees may explain risky behaviour in children.

The study is from researchers at the University of Michigan in the USA. They studied over 100 wild chimpanzees in a national park in Uganda. The chimps ranged in age from 2 to 65 years. The researchers looked at how the animals swung through trees. The youngest chimps seemed to do more dangerous things, like letting go of branches and letting themselves fall. Older chimps took fewer risks and made sure they gripped branches firmly.

Lead researcher and anthropologist Laura MacLatchy suggested why children and young chimpanzees take more risks. She believes it is because they are at an age when parents supervise them less. Parents and carers often stop very young children from doing things that might cause injuries. However, young teens have more freedom and want to try new and risky things. Professor MacLatchy said the risk-taking was the same for male and female chimps and humans. The website ScienceAlert said that "some anthropologists argue for increasing children's access to thrill-seeking play, including the old-fashioned monkey bars, as a way to help them develop motor skills and skeletal strength".

Sources: sciencealert.com / earth.com / sciencenews.com

Writing

Children should experiment and take more risks. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

teenagers / crazy things / child / injury / chimpanzee / national park / animals / risks / anthropologist / supervise / parents / freedom / thrill seeking / play / old-fashioned

True / False

- 1) The article says all teenagers do very crazy things. T / F
- 2) Young children take more risks than teenagers. T / F
- 3) Researchers studied more than 100 chimps in Uganda. T / F
- 4) Researchers said older chimps were more likely to let go of branches. T / F
- 5) A researcher said chimpanzee behaviour helps explain teen behaviour. T / F
- 6) Teenagers take more risks because their parents aren't around. T / F
- 7) A researcher said male chimps took more risks than female chimps. T / F
- 8) The researcher hoped more children would play on monkey bars. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

1. well known	a. conduct
2. injury	b. expand
3. behaviour	c. held
4. fall	d. harm
5. gripped	e. look after
6. supervise	f. fun
7. cause	g. famous
8. thrill	h. use of
9. access	i. drop
10. develop	j. lead to

Discussion – Student A

- a) What crazy things did you do when you were a teenager?
- b) What crazy things do very old people do?
- c) How much of a risk-taker are you?
- d) What are the good and bad things about taking risks?
- e) Does chimpanzee behaviour explain human behaviour?
- f) Why do we take fewer risks as we get older?
- g) Are smartphones making children take fewer risks today?
- h) What's the biggest risk you've ever taken?

BreakingNewsEnglish - Many online quizzes at URL below

Phrase Match

1. Teenagers are well known
2. Some of these are dangerous and
3. The chimps ranged in
4. researchers looked at how the animals
5. made sure they gripped
6. doing things that might cause
7. the risk-taking was the same for
8. increasing children's access to thrill-
9. a way to help them develop motor
10. skeletal

- a. age from 2 to 65 years
- b. skills
- c. branches firmly
- d. seeking play
- e. lead to injury
- f. for doing crazy things
- g. strength
- h. injuries
- i. swung through trees
- j. male and female chimps

Discussion – Student B

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) How many risks do we take every day?
- c) Should parents encourage children to take more risks?
- d) Would you like to take more risks?
- e) What would happen if all world leaders were teenagers?
- f) Did any risk you took go badly?
- g) What do you think of old-fashioned monkey bars?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

Spelling

1. Some of these are aoudregsn
2. lead to iyrun, or worse
3. lipxaen risky behaviour in children
4. chimps gardne in age from 2 to 65
5. how the animals gunsw through trees
6. letting go of scraenhb
7. Lead researcher and hgsltapooitrno
8. at an age when people iesuevspr them less
9. young teens have more eodmerf
10. argue for increasing children's ascsec
11. Irihlt-seeking play
12. develop motor skills and skeletal sghterth

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. a	4. i	5. c
6. e	7. j	8. f	9. h	10. b

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions. (Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1. What does the article say teenagers are well known for doing?
2. What happens once a child become a teenager?
3. How many chimpanzees did researchers look at in the research?
4. How old were the chimps?
5. Who (or what) gripped branches more firmly?
6. What kind of researcher is professor Laura MacLatchy?
7. What does the article say teenagers have more of?
8. Who did researchers say risk-taking was the same for?
9. What do anthropologists want children to have more access to?
10. What kind of skills can monkey bars develop in children?

Speaking – Risks

Rank these with your partner. Put the biggest risks at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Not exercising
- Smoking
- Unhealthy eating
- Easy passwords
- Wasting time
- Ignoring traffic signals
- Clicking email links
- Walking across the road

Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	F	5	T	6	T	7	F	8	T
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.