

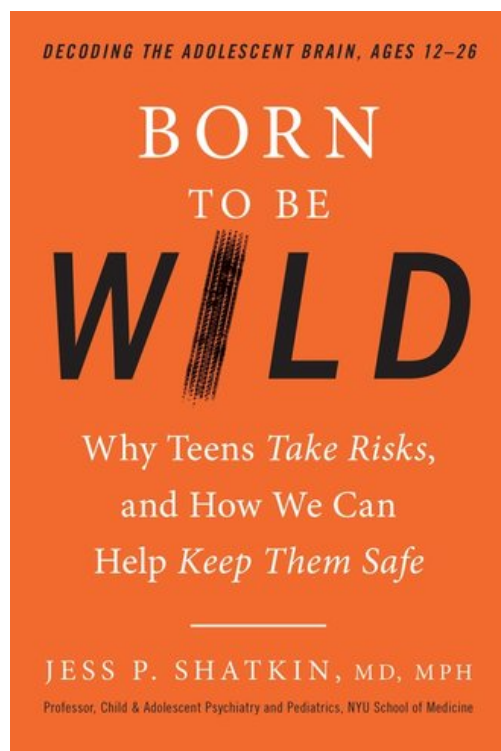
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"I believe in the magic and authority of words." — René Char

**Book Review: Born to be Wild by Jess P. Shatkin, MD MPH**

Posted on [September 9, 2017](#)

**Delayed adolescence** has been in the news lately, and not in a good way. We have read and heard from an untold number of pundits, politicians, and social theorists how our young people are in danger of never growing up. That somehow it is anathema to the survival of our species that we, in the USA, have allowed our children to



retain their childhood longer than anytime before in history. Well, in his book, Dr. Jess P. Shatkin, **[Born to be Wild, Why Teens Take Risks, and How We Can Help Keep Them Safe](#)**, not only refutes that premise, but outlines a path that actually will allow society to deal with the highly intelligent, forward looking, challenging, and overstimulated adolescents that we know and love.

Initially Dr. Shatkin explains simply how it is in society's best interests to allow our off spring to exist in that in-between state of adolescence just that much longer. He details the benefits to their brains, how they view life, and how successful they will eventually become. Brain elasticity is a much needed outgrowth of nonrestrictive learning and growing. Taking chances, the stuff that is the thing of societal change, is a major part of adolescent behavior, and is something we really do want to encourage to a point. Important note: Adolescence does not mean just early teens, the author explains that this period of life can also mean college age, and through their twenties.

After explaining how being young, and the challenges facing how the young think is a really positive outcome of human development and evolution, Shatkin then outlines several important programs, ideas, and parenting/school must dos that will encourage your adolescent to grow in a good way in order to become productive members of society, without basically killing themselves.

Shatkin puts a kabosh on long held ideas about adolescents. There is not doubt that adolescents are risk takers, but it is not necessarily because they think of themselves as invulnerable. In contravention to longheld beliefs, he explains that adolescent behavior is despite those feelings of a lack of control. He explains how the emotional upheaval that many of them are going through is normal evolutionary callings, and how it is encoded into our DNA to take risks at the time humans are physically at their height. But then again, in our modern world, simply because something is part of our primal brain doesn't mean that it won't lead to problems, issues, and undesired outcomes. We can, and should, help adolescents through these periods in particular positive ways. The main

point is to teach them to channel that penchant for risk taking into something that can turn into long term positive behavior.

The author goes through a number of challenges that are unique to our society. In fact, he outlines plans for both parents, and schools, working in tandem, on how to deal with our children. He acknowledges that this is not a one-off situation, or that we can do this on our own. Society, as a whole, needs to be there for the adolescent in positive and proactive ways.

Shatkin outlines what is good in schools, and what needs to change. In fact, he particularly addresses the need for schools to maintain programs in movement, art, and social learning. Much has been done in the last decades to return education back to emphasizing the 3 Rs. But what is lost in this incessant drum beat of standardized tests is the need for students to learn how to work in groups and the effect of figuring out how to handle problems, negotiate, and work through curve balls (a term of art coined by one of my own sons).

Acknowledging emotional IQ, teaching socially appropriate behavior, as well as channeling the ability to stay focused, while developing [sticktoitiveness](#) are attributes of successful adults. Limits, boundaries, and the good old fashioned ability to say “no,” also does wonders for our adolescents. Basically what Shatkin addresses is what is being lost in our children’s education, and that is how to actually tackle adult problems.

For anyone interested in what is to become of our children, how society and parenting needs to change in light of our new world and challenging scientific, technological times, then this book is a good beginning.

*This book is available October 3, 2017.*

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