**EVALUATING RISKS...THE PRICE AND THE PRIZE**

**by Roberta Beecroft**

 Choices! Choices! Choices! Everywhere we turn we face decisions, and risks. What to eat? What to wear? What courses? Which school? Drink? Smoke? Sex? School and job? Which CD? Some choices are simple and have a short term impact. Others can change the whole course of a life, perhaps even end it. Some choices open doors, others slam them shut.

 Risk taking is the proverbial `doubled-edged sword'. It can hurt us or help us. We need to take some risks in order to grow and participate in life--ask for a date, learn to swim, drive a car, speak up for ourselves, travel, play sports. Risks are an inevitable part of living. Managing life's risks, making clear conscious choices about which risks to take...that takes courage!

 Only fools take risks thoughtlessly, refusing to respect danger or acknowledge the damage that can be done to our minds, bodies, relationships and reputations by some choices.

 How do we evaluate risks so we can make choices that don't harm us? You're the one who's in charge of your behaviour and so no one can evaluate your risks but you. When we're caught up in the excitement and emotion that go along with risks, our vision is affected by our feelings. Many of the questions that we need to ask ourselves before we act, get lost in the confusion of the moment.

 Maybe these will help cut through the confusion.

 LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

 - Is this permanent or reversible?

 - What's the best possible outcome, the worst possible outcome?

 - What's my goal, my purpose; why am I doing this?

 - What might I lose; what price am I paying?

 - Am I being realistic; am I fooling myself? How?

 - Is this risk necessary; can I get what I need another way?

 - What do I need to know before I take this risk?

 - What am I trying to prove by doing this?

 - What will people think of me if I do this; do I care?

 - What do I want others to think about me?

 - Am I afraid? Of what?

 - Am I being impulsive; am I thinking clearly?

 - Whose attention am I trying to get? Why?

 - Am I being pressured; by whom?

 - Am I doing this to please someone else? Who? Why?

 - Am I free to say no or yes?

 - Can I really afford this?

 - Am I trying to impress someone? Who?

 - What embarrasses me most?

 - With whom am I competing?

 - Do I deserve better than this?

 - Do I notice my moods and how they affect my actions?

 - Can I turn back? What will change if I go ahead?

 - How might I get hurt? Do I have blind spots?

 - Does this decision give me joy, anxiety, peace of mind?

 - Am I being totally honest with myself? With others?

 All of these questions can be helpful in deciding whether or not you want to take that risk. Whenever we take a risk without knowing our goal or purpose, we're in trouble. We need to keep examining our choices until we understand our needs and motives clearly. We also need to know clearly what we stand to lose. If we don't understand the loss involved, then we don't yet understand the risk. With honesty and clarity, we increase the chance of reaping risk's prizes without paying too costly a price.

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 Feeling Great is written by Roberta Beecroft, a professional counsellor specializing in adolescent and family relationships.

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Standards Addressed:

* RL.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
* RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
* RL.7.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.
* RI.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
* RI.7.2 Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
* RI.7.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
* W.7.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.