

*Too Safe for their Own
Good:
How the Right Amount of
Risk and Responsibility
Helps Children and Teens
Thrive*

*Thinker in Residence Series
Commissioner for Children
and Young People
Western Australia*

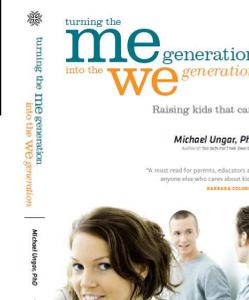
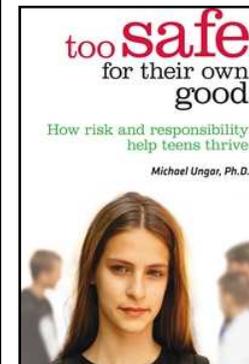
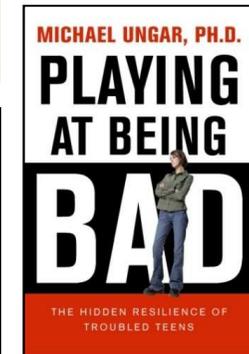
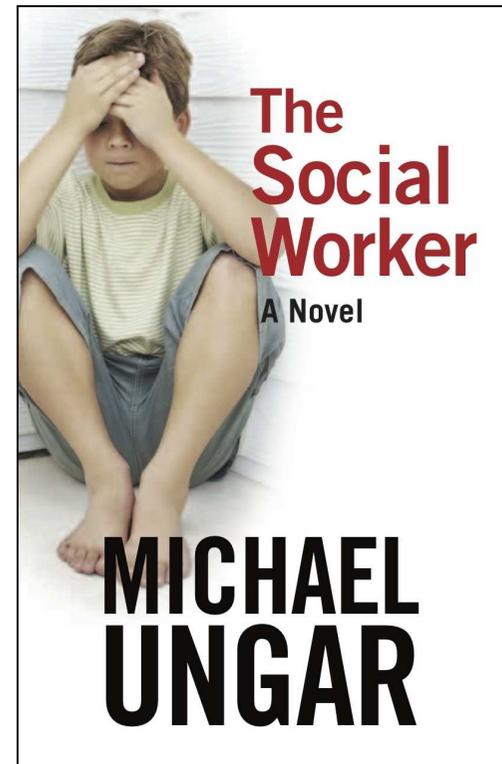
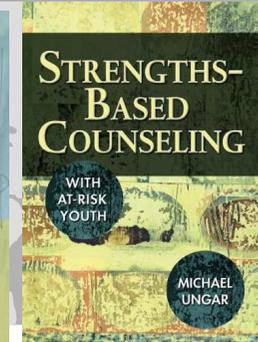
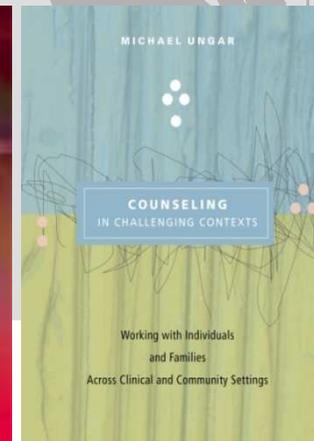
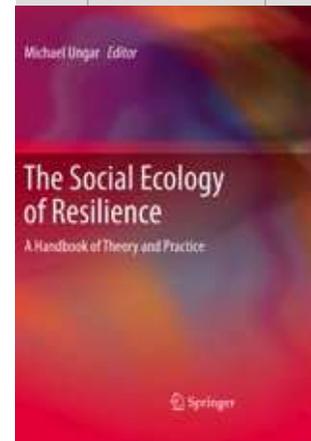
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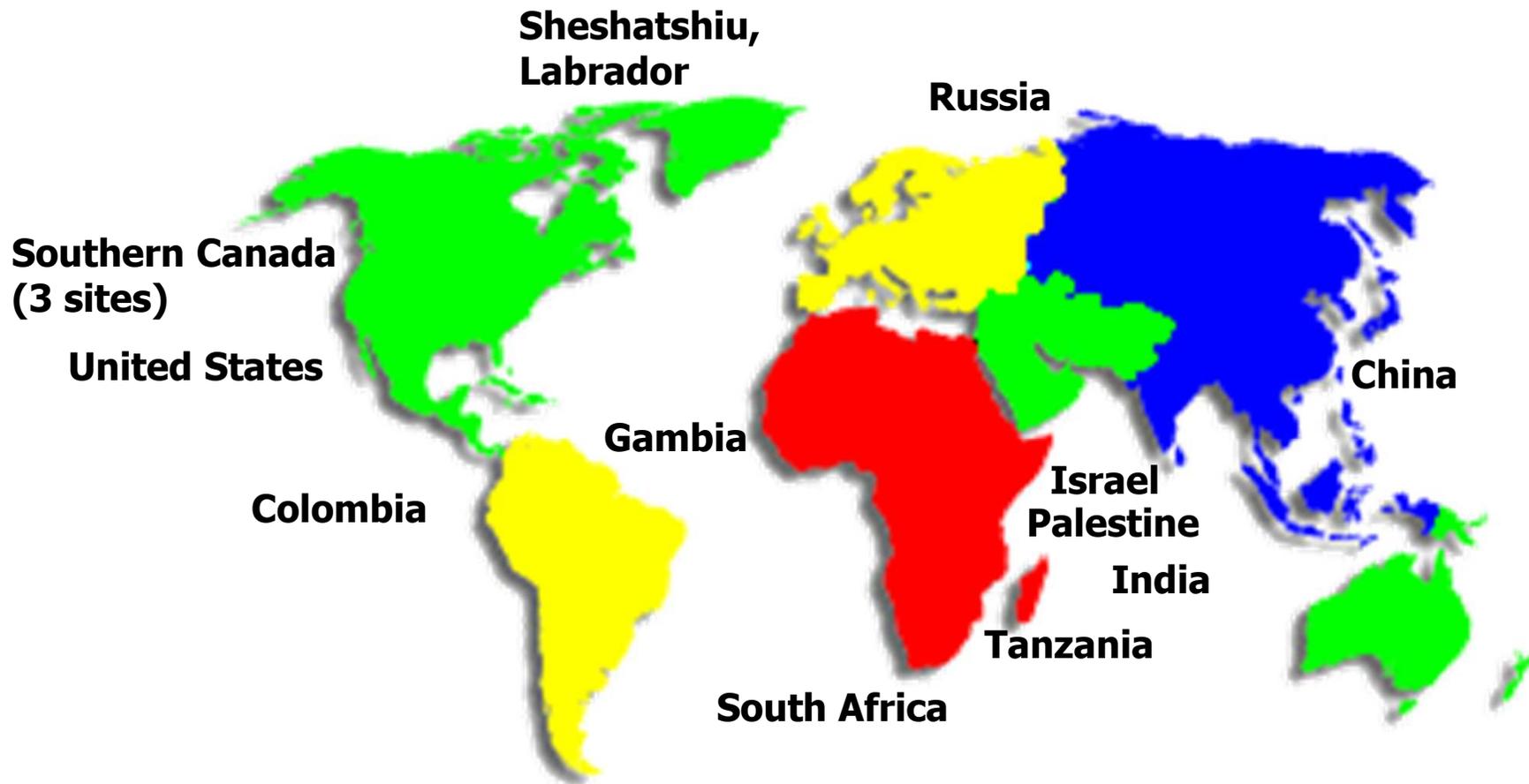
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The International Resilience Project: Sites





Some Canadian kids are at risk:

- ✿ Living in poverty
- ✿ Neglected
- ✿ Drug addicted
- ✿ Failing out of school, or school failing them
- ✿ Mentally ill (self-harming, eating disordered, depressed, anxious)
- ✿ Family violence, street violence
- ✿ Family members' addictions
- ✿ Toxic physical environments



There is a danger of over-protecting

- ✦ Denying children the “Risk-taker’s Advantage”
 - ✦ A lack of opportunity to experience appropriate challenge
 - ✦ A lack of opportunity to experience appropriate responsibility
- ✦ Need **Balance** between ensuring safety and biopsychosocial development



Actual Risks facing our children today

- ✦ Crimes by teens: *down*
- ✦ Likelihood of being murdered: *down*
- ✦ Rate of school drop-out: *down*
- ✦ Accidents causing death: *down*
- ✦ Smoking and drug use: *down*
- ✦ Early sexual activity: *down/stable*
- ✦ Pregnancy rates among teens: *down*



Why do parents deny children the “risk-taker’s advantage”?

- ✦ Normative functioning (risk-aversion)
- ✦ Perceived threats to the family
- ✦ Self-actualization of the parent
- ✦ Perceived lack of capacity among children



**What risks did
you take
growing up?**

**Were those
lessons helpful,
unhelpful, or
both?**

**Taking those
risks, what did
you learn?**

**How will our
children learn
these same
lessons?**



Risk-takers Hear 4 Messages:

- ⊕ "You belong"
- ⊕ "You're trustworthy"
- ⊕ "You're responsible"
- ⊕ "You're capable"



Risk-takers Need (in culturally relevant ways):

- ✦ Close relationships (belonging)
- ✦ Age appropriate challenges (trust)
- ✦ Opportunities to contribute (responsibility)
- ✦ Rites of passage (to feel capable)



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Better to Substitute than Suppress



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**Better to Say
'Yes' than 'No'**

How to Find a SUBSTITUTE

Must be just as
ADVENTUROUS

Must be just as
MEANINGFUL

Must be just as
RESPONSIBLE

Consider

What were you
doing as a child?

Risk-taking?

Responsibility-
seeking?

**Offer a SUBSTITUTE that is EQUALLY:
Adventurous, Meaningful and
Responsible**



Too Safe for Their Own Good

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The Right Amount of Risk and Responsibility

- ✦ Work Opportunities: paid or volunteer; certification as coach, life guard...
- ✦ Dangerous 'toys': knives, chemistry sets, scooters, make-up, video games, motorbikes, extreme sport gear
- ✦ Navigate community: walking, busing, skateboarding, driving



The Right Amount of Risk and Responsibility

- ✦ Bodily experiences: celebrations of puberty, first love
- ✦ Outdoor challenge: wilderness trip, extreme sports



Too much exposure to risk
(adventure and responsibility) and
we endanger a child.

Too little exposure to risk
(adventure and responsibility) and
we fail to provide a child
opportunities to grow up healthy.



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Thank you!

