

BEAR GRYLLS

viewpoint

Live dangerously

Every kid needs a penknife, says the Chief Scout

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH to go to Eton College – an incredible school where you learn amazing things – but if I had to write the education curriculum for every kid in this country, it wouldn't be Latin and maths, it would be the following: how to light a fire, tie a knot, use a penknife, build a raft, get on with people, eat healthily, keep fit, be part of a team and learn effective leadership. And that's it. Subjects that I have had to learn the hard way.

It's a shame that, as a society, so many have lost these skills. Recently I took 13 men to a desert island for Channel 4 and left them for a month to fend for themselves. They didn't have many practical skills so I gave them a day of training and then they had to think smart and figure out how to survive. Nobody told them their priority was water until they became thirsty and thought, "Hold on, I can't drink that water because it's stagnant, so now I need a fire to boil it. S***, now fire's a priority. But how do the hell do I light a fire? I've never lit a fire, even with a match! So how do I do it?" And how did they learn to do it? The only way they

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GARY MOYSE/REX

could survive was by failing, and failing, and failing, and failing – until finally, *woof*, they got fire. Bingo!

You've got to be prepared to fail at a few things but to keep trying, and also be prepared to take a few risks if you're going to achieve anything in life.

Which is why we have to teach our children how to embrace and manage risk – the risk of failure and physical risk.

Here's the deal: if you try to negate risk in children's lives, you do them a disservice, because you teach them not to be afraid of risk. You can't negate risk. There is risk everywhere, even when you go out on the street. So if you teach kids to dodge risk, you totally disempower them. You

empower kids by teaching them how to do something dangerous, but how to do it safely. That's what I say to Scouts all the time: "We're going to climb this, it's going to be scary and dangerous, but we're going to do it together and look after each other to stay safe!"

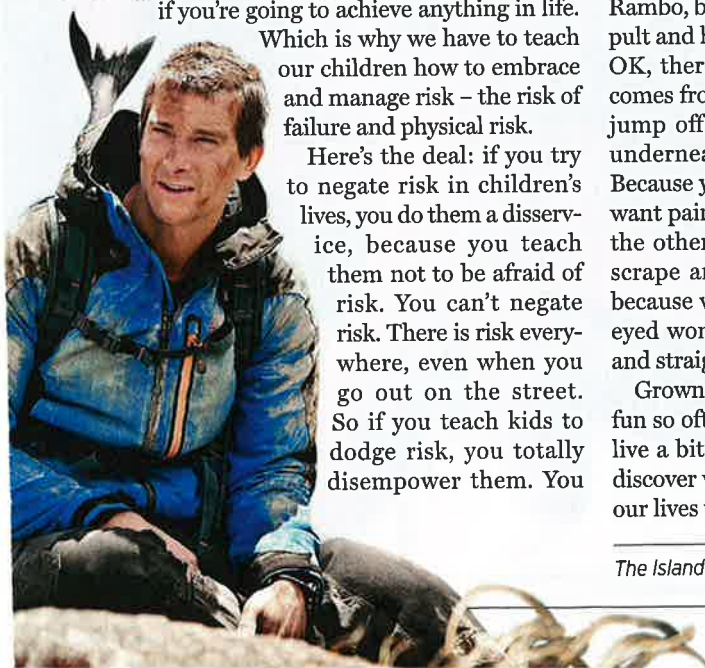
Kids respond to that sort of thing, or when I say to budding adventurers, "Listen – a blunt penknife is a dangerous knife. Make sure it's really sharp" (it's true – with a blunt knife you will get frustrated and often cut yourself). The kids' faces light up. Like all kids, they want a mega-sharp penknife – great, but teach them to respect it and use it properly.

The thing is, sometimes in life we get cut. My six-year-old recently cut himself on a knife, and came in with blood pouring everywhere, but you know what? He's not cut himself again. He has learnt how to handle a knife; they do that at Beaver Scouts. I had my first penknife at six, but 200 years ago I doubt there was a six-year-old in Britain who couldn't start a fire with a knife and a flint. It would be like a six-year-old today using a fork to pick up a fish finger. Kids were taught to be resourceful and practical; so yes, it was a man's job, but they could all make a fire.

MY SONS LOVE setting up "search and rescue" scenarios at home; they've got to rescue one another as a casualty and they've got to lower themselves down a slope or from a tree and tie a rope around each other and haul each other up – they love all that sort of stuff. What kid doesn't?

I think it's important I teach them those sort of things, it's part of being a dad. I don't want to bring up Rambo, but it's good to show them how to make a catapult and how to tie a knot and how to improvise a kite. OK, there's a balance. There's a duty of care, which comes from experience. And you're right to say, "Don't jump off there without knowing if there are rocks underneath," or "Don't play with fire without me." Because you love and care for your kids, and you don't want pain or hurt to come to them, of course – but on the other hand, you've got to let kids have the odd scrape and adventure. And don't forget to join in, because when you do you also learn from their open-eyed wonder at the world, their gratitude, trust, fun and straight-talking.

Grown-ups get in the way of that stuff. They spoil the fun so often! Let's have fun again, let's get muddy, let's live a bit more freely. And perhaps then we will also discover what it takes to survive – if we had to fight for our lives with just the bare minimum around us.



The Island with Bear Grylls is on Monday at 9.00pm on C4