

# Courier Mail

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## Books

### Michael Ungar says 'marshmallow generation' too safe

• October 17, 2008 11:00PM

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**PARENTS' constant need to bubble-wrap their children to keep them safe &#150; driving them everywhere, organising their time, cocooning them from every imaginable danger &#150; can put them in harm's way as teenagers, says a visiting family therapist and writer.**

Children of this so-called "marshmallow generation" are too safe for their own good, says **Michael Ungar**. (<http://www.michaelungar.com/>) Their lives are stripped of risk and responsibility.

Ungar warns of a disturbing trend. "This constant security and lack of risk is often linked to troubling behaviours like drug abuse, early sexual activity, violence and truancy.

"And more affluent, middle-class parents seem to be the most likely to bubble-wrap," says the Canadian father of two teenagers, on the eve of an Australian visit.

"On the whole, the more affluence we have, the more risk-averse we become. So well-off parents try to control and make safe all of their children's lives, unknowingly setting them up for trouble."

Ungar, author of the just-released ***Too Safe For Their Own Good: How risk and responsibility help teens thrive*** (<http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=94&book=9781741756494>) stresses he is not advocating a "hands-off" parenting approach.

"It takes time and thought," he says. "Being watchful for signs of their need for more risks and responsibilities, thinking of compromises, talking and spending time with them, this isn't hands-off. It's coaching them to become resilient adults.

**Read an excerpt from Michael Ungar's *Too Safe For Their Own Good*** ([http://www.michaelungar.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=text.&str\\_cmpID=25](http://www.michaelungar.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=text.&str_cmpID=25))

"How can we not let our 13-year-old walk down to the nearby shop or ride their bike on the road but, in three years' time, expect them to have the road sense to drive a car? It's crazy."

He says he expected a backlash to his message.

"When I'm addressing a hall full of parents, I expect some to feel very challenged," Ungar says. "But many suspect intuitively that kids need more healthy risk in their lives."

Ungar, who has been a family therapist for 20 years, now working with troubled youth, points to a strong link between affluence and drugs.

"Often it is in middle and upper-class communities where we find the dark and hidden realities of youth who are ignored," he says. "And money doesn't help. It can make the problem worse.

"As a group, this population is more likely to use drugs than the poor kids who are the dealers. In fact, one of the best predictors that a child will use drugs is a weekly allowance of \$25 or more. When you have no other way to prove yourself, drugs can look like a wonderful solution. Research shows that affluent kids report higher levels of anxiety and depression."

He says giving a teenager a sizeable allowance is fine as long as they have to pay for their clothes, gifts for friends, music and phone credit, social outings and save some out of it.

"But paying for all their needs AND handing over \$30 a week for their fun is crazy. No kid spends that much on pop and chips. What else are they going to spend it on but alcohol and drugs?"

Today's children are safer than at any other time in history, Ungar says. "Fewer children than ever before are injured riding bicycles. We vaccinate more, and sanitise their play places. Children are less in danger. Yet parents' perception is the world is a dangerous place because they read about one child being abducted in Portugal."

These same parents often grew up riding their bike everywhere, playing in the street with neighbourhood kids or down the nearby creek, had a pocketknife, didn't head home until dinnertime, made their own fun and had chores. But now they drive their children everywhere, organise their time, watch all their sporting practices and games, ban playing in their street or neighbourhood park – forcing them to play inside, mostly on the internet – and give them more pocket money.

"We've taken all the steel playground wheels (roundabouts) from parks. We've banned playing tag in schools. We've chopped down the trees kids might climb and injure themselves on. We've made it all so safe. So where will they turn to find their thrills?"

Ungar says evidence shows teens turn to unhealthy risk-taking. They get tattoos and piercings, drink and drive, take drugs, have early sexual experience, get in trouble with the law, stay out late and push boundaries.

"We do our children no favours sheltering them from the challenges that come with living life fully."

He urges parents to think about what kind of adult they want their child to be. Then look at ways of working towards that, whether it is getting a part-time job or showing them how to save up and travel.

Ungar advocates adequate substitutes when teens want to do something parents think is too dangerous.

Start small and think of ways you can offer them a little more risk and responsibility. Extend your daughter's curfew. Let your son share a glass of wine at the dinner table. Let your son go to that rock concert but arrange a time and place for pick-up. Buy your daughter for her birthday one piece of clothing she really wants and which you'd rather she not have.

He urges parents to hang out with children. Long car rides to concerts or sport are good. Keep the computer in a public space in the home. Talk about important things with other adults in front of them. "Ultimately we want to grow good adults," he says.

**Michael Ungar is in Australia between October 27 and November 4, visiting Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. His book *Too Safe For Their Own Good: How risk and responsibility help teens thrive*, Allen & Unwin, \$26.95, is out now.**

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## Latest

### Bali trip with virgins: LNP's bizarre bet



MORE questions raised about the LNP's hierarchy with allegations emerging of senior party members' bizarre election bet involving a trip to Bali with two virgins.

**10 comments on this story**

### Boys burn bums with backyard brand



A TRIO of teens couldn't handle the heat and had to call for help after they used a fire poker to "brand" their backsides during a night of fun.

### This week's top images



- **News**

- **Entertainment**
- **Sport**
- **Socials**
- **Weddings**
- **Photo Sales**

## **Courier-Mail Sport**

- **All sports**
- **NRL**
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- **Grand Prix**
- **Rugby Gold**
- **Soccer**
- **Cricket**
- **Olympics**
- **Racing**
- **Motor**
- **Golf**
- **Local Sport**

### **Top Stories**

#### **Slater out for three months**



DALLY M Medallist Billy Slater's collarbone is broken in five different places and will require a metal plate to repair the damage.

#### **Caddie to be kept away from Tiger**



CADDIE Steve Williams will be kept well away from Tiger Woods this week as part of a multimillion-dollar plan to win over the American superstar.

### **Feature**



- [Origin Glory](#)
- [Bazza's Sport Quiz](#)

## Life

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## Food + Drink

### Brisbane's best gelati



4:46PM *Natascha Mirosh* GELATI, as it is made in Italy today, is always milk rather than cream-based and thus slightly lower in fat. We have the Italian migrants who made their home here to thank for our "gelati culture" and the proliferation of good gelati shops.

### Brisbane's best bars for after-work drinks



6:34PM After a grinding day at the office, where in Brisbane should you head for a cleansing ale, creative cocktail, crisp white or calming red? We pick 10 top bars to wind down after work.

## Out + About

## Top 10 spas to unwind



8:29PM What better way to unwind and shut off the world than with a bit of "me time" in the form of a massage, a facial, or a weekend health retreat? Here are our top 10 spas in southeast Queensland and northern NSW.

## Best weekend markets



6:18PM Whether it's fresh produce or a special gift you won't get anywhere else, you will find it at your local market. We check out some of the region's best.

## What's On

### Chad Morgan is 'not dead yet'



HARD-living Queensland country music legend Chad Morgan is bursting with life and chuffed to be starring in a documentary entitled *I'm Not Dead Yet*.

### Supanova: Freaks, geeks and pop culture



IT'S the revenge of the nerds this weekend as geeks turn out to celebrate sci-fi, fantasy, movies, comics and video games at the annual Supanova.

## VIEW EVENT CALENDAR

### Latest Deal



### Shop Smart's Paddy Hintz hunts down the daily bargains

Sketchers has now opened at DFO and is offering 20% off storewide until November 30

## Business

- **Breaking News**
- **Business Owner**
- **Jobs**
- **Boardroom Radio**
- **Property News**

## Top Stories

### India hungry for coal-rich Qld



A HUGE demand for electricity in India is sparking a billion-dollar shopping spree in Queensland.

### Extra holiday at Christmas riles retailers



RETAILERS have rejected the State Government's plans for an extra public holiday at Christmas as a backdoor way of boosting pay for workers.

AEDT

### ASX200 - Top Gainers & Losers at 04:34PM

Code	Name	Price	Percent
PNA	Panaust	3.38	10.45%
GBG	Gindalbie Metal..	0.545	9.0%
AUT	Aurora Oil & Gas	3.23	8.75%
SXL	Southern Cross ..	1.22	8.44%
COH	Cochlear	53.0	-1.66%
WBCPB	Westpac SPS II	105.65	-1.27%
NWS	News Corporation	17.0	-1.23%
IDL	Industrea	1.24	-1.2%

More Gainers & Losers