



RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower to middle secondary students
(ages 13+; years 8–10)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding; Personal and social capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A must-read book to facilitate discussions about online safety, *Risk* explores the potential dangers of social media and the internet in an accessible, easy-to-read way
- Written by a former police officer and paramedic whose experiences have informed the book and given the story authenticity

THEMES

- Online safety
- The complexity of friendship
- Grief
- Police investigations
- Survivor guilt

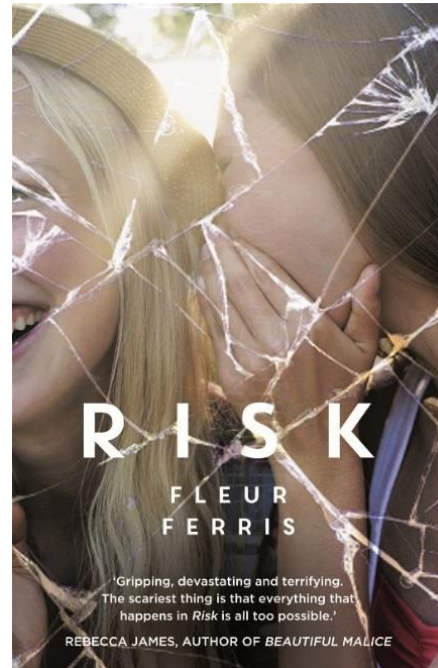
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Risk

By Fleur Ferris

BOOK BLURB

Taylor and Sierra have been best friends for their whole lives. But Taylor's fed up. Why does Sierra always get what – and who – she wants? From kissing Taylor's crush to stealing the guy they both met online for herself, Sierra doesn't seem to notice when she hurts her friends.

So when Sierra says Jacob Jones is the one and asks her friends to cover for her while she goes to meet him for the first time, Taylor rolls her eyes.

But Sierra doesn't come back when she said she would. One day. Two days. Three . . .

What if Taylor's worrying for nothing? What if Sierra's just being Sierra, forgetting about everyone else to spend time with her new guy?

When Taylor finally tells Sierra's mum that her daughter is missing, Taylor and her friends are thrown into a dark world they never even knew existed.

Can Taylor find Sierra's abductor in time? Or should she be looking for a killer?

When a former police officer and paramedic writes a novel inspired by true stories of online predators and love gone wrong, you know you're getting the real deal.

STUDENT REVIEWS

Random House Book Buddies reviewed the book favourably, noting that its themes had a strong impact on them, and that it makes the reader think about their own actions:

- 'I loved reading this book . . . The storyline is hard hitting in a way that is still enjoyable and fun and it gives the reader something to think about.' Lauren, age 16
- 'Great book, really makes you re-evaluate what you're doing online. Hits you pretty hard and is really impactful.' Catherine, age 16
- 'This suspenseful story is a thrilling read from beginning to end . . . I was inspired by [Taylor's] bravery and mental strength that helped her through the tough times.' Nora, age 14
- 'I think this book had a very powerful message that came across incredibly well and I loved reading it!' Stephanie, age 17

PLOT SUMMARY

What if your best friend went on a date with a mystery guy – and didn't come back?

Best friends Taylor and Sierra are mucking around on Taylor's laptop when they meet a guy in an online chat room. Sierra's parents have banned her from using the internet, so when Sierra goes home, Taylor continues to chat to Jacob and finds out they seem to have a lot in common. She's thrilled to find out that a guy seems interested in her.

On Monday at school, though, she discovers that Sierra also chatted more to Jacob – and as usual, the outgoing and vivacious Sierra overshadows Taylor and wins his attention. Taylor is devastated – she'd already found out that Sierra kissed Callum, Taylor's secret crush, over the summer holidays. Life's not fair, especially when Sierra's around.

Moving quickly, Sierra sets up a date with Jacob on Friday after school. She asks Taylor and their friends to cover for her. Even though she's upset, Taylor agrees to help by pretending that Sierra is with her. She's too embarrassed to head into the city with Sierra – she doesn't want to meet face to face with the guy who rejected her. Instead she heads to her friend Riley's house for the afternoon, along with Riley's boyfriend, and Callum.

But Sierra abuses the favour and calls to say she's in love and she's going to spend the night with Jacob. She doesn't come home on Saturday, doesn't answer her phone and by Sunday, still nobody's heard from her . . .

Taylor is torn, and full of conflicting emotions. She doesn't want to betray Sierra by telling Sierra's parents, but at the same time she's worried. Is Sierra just up to her usual selfish tricks, or is something really wrong?

Finally, Callum convinces her to tell. The police are called and their worst fears are confirmed when Sierra's body is found a week later.

The police are doing everything they can, but 'Jacob Jones' has used an online proxy box to create a fake, untraceable identity. The photo he sent Taylor of himself at Brighton Beach is one he'd Photoshopped from a photo stolen from a famous photographer and a random guy's Facebook profile picture, and the security cameras where he and Sierra met show only a man with his face covered by a baseball cap. Sierra's death is what police call a 'vapour case', one where an internet stalker disappears without trace.

Taylor and her friends and family are devastated. Sierra's mother, once like a second mum to her, can't forgive Taylor for her role in covering for Sierra that Friday night. The entire school is completely shocked by the tragedy – although some students say that it's Sierra's own fault. Who would be so stupid as to meet a guy they met online?

And Riley's not speaking to Taylor, either.

Taylor decides to create a website in Sierra's memory, but it becomes much more than a tribute when other girls start sending her photos of men they've met online. What if one of them is a killer? How can you tell? The website becomes more and more popular as teen viewers join the discussion about what it means to be 'online invisible' or 'risk'.

Taylor tries to find clues to the identity of Sierra's killer – but even if she can find something useful, can she save the predator's next victim in time?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fleur spent the first seventeen years of her life growing up on a farm in north-west Victoria. She then moved twenty times in twenty years.

During this time, Fleur sometimes saw the darker side to life while working for a number of years as a police officer and a paramedic.

She now lives a more settled lifestyle on a rice farm in southern New South Wales, with her husband and three young children.

Fleur's colourful and diverse background has given her unique insight into today's society and an endless pool of experiences to draw from.

Find out more at fleurferris.com.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Fleur says:

My inspiration for writing *Risk* came from a number of incidents. The first occurrence was when a friend contacted me, worried about her fourteen-year-old daughter, who had fallen for a guy she had met online. It became apparent to the mother that her daughter's new friend was much older than he said he was and she feared that her daughter was being groomed by a predator. When the mother phoned the guy to confront him, he hung up, disconnected his phone and never made contact with the daughter again. Police were unable to identify him.

The reason my friend came to me with her concerns was because I am an ex-police officer and worked in a squad that dealt with child abuse and sex offences. She thought I'd know about the sites her daughter had been on, that I'd know how to identify the guy and that I'd know how to keep her daughter safe from online predators. I didn't have the answers she was hoping for.

Over the next two weeks, three cases involving teenage girls being groomed and lured away by online predators were reported in local papers. The number of incidents in our community involving this issue caused me so much concern that I started researching it.

At first I had no thoughts of writing a book about this subject. I was acting as a worried and protective mother of three children who were yet to reach the age where they would be users of social media. To realise how easy and riskless it was for predators to meet, groom and lure unsuspecting people was disturbing.

I spent time in chat rooms and on sites specially designed to facilitate meetings of strangers. I spoke

to everyone I could, online and in person, aged ten and above. Kids, parents, teachers, police officers, strangers . . .

To fully grasp the extent of this problem I had to first understand the online culture our children are growing up in. When I was in the police force, social media wasn't used as widely as it is today. The general public were reluctant to post so many personal details about themselves. This meant predators had to leave the concealment of their homes and seek out and groom their victims in person. The risk of them coming under suspicion was higher. But times have changed.

I couldn't find one teenager who wasn't on social media, and the personal information they posted was extensive. Online communication is a part of our everyday life now, and for teenagers it has never been any different. I, too, am an avid user of social media. I use many sites for personal and professional reasons, yet before these incidents, I hadn't put much thought to certain elements – dangerous and frightening elements – that my children may be faced with.

Somewhere in this process an idea for a book came to me, and once the characters were so vivid they seemed real, and when scenes played out in my head as though I was watching a movie, I began writing *Risk*.

Risk doesn't try to tell teenagers not to go online, nor does it preach not to meet new people online. The story shows one of many outcomes that can occur when meeting someone online and then meeting them in person without fully understanding the lengths a predator will go to gain a person's trust.

Risk was drawn from a combination of real-life cases, stories told to me by teenagers, my own experiences of social media, my experience in helping victims of sex offences and my knowledge of and dealings with predatory sex offenders. Writing this story was one way to share my knowledge and experience.

WRITING STYLE

Fleur says:

I love putting characters into extraordinary situations and showing how they got there, the choices they make, the actions they take, and how they cope.

Risk is told through the eyes of Taylor, who is fifteen. The reader is in Taylor's head and sees only what she sees. To give this story punch, it was important to hold the reader close, so they could feel what Taylor feels and experience what Taylor experiences, as the events unfold.

Taylor faces many conflicts, some internal, others external, and at times she doesn't fully understand the behaviour of those around her. Conflict is often the result of lack of insight or misunderstanding, and writing from a first-person point of view allows the reader to experience both the internal and external aspects of conflict.

Sometimes inaction can be as damaging or as critical as action. Taylor has two major regrets throughout the second half of this novel. Her first is that she didn't go with Sierra to meet her new guy. The second is that she waited two days before reporting Sierra was missing. At the time she made her decisions not to go with Sierra and not to tell Sierra's mother that her daughter was gone, Taylor was able to rationalise these two things in her mind, and the reader could understand them. It is not until later that her inaction is questioned or criticised.

I joined the police force when I was nineteen years old. At times I'd attend what I would consider a bizarre situation. I would think to myself, 'How could a situation come to this?' or 'Why would someone do that?' I soon learned there was usually a sequence of events, a set of circumstances that, in the mind of the person involved, rationalised their actions. Even if what they did was something I wouldn't do or something I disagreed with, after investigating I would usually understand why they did it, or how the situation evolved.

It taught me that nothing is 'black and white'; the line between right and wrong can blur and distort into one large grey area and it is easy to make an unfair judgement when coming in at the end, looking in from the outside and seeing the damage with hindsight.

This very thing – understanding what at first seems bizarre, irrational or totally unthinkable, making sense of what at first appears to be senseless – is one thing I love to explore in my work.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Do you think you are safe when you go online? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the risks are of talking to people online who you haven't first met in real life?
3. What social media do you use?
4. Do your parents know about what you do online?
5. Have you ever told a lie for a friend? Did telling your lie cause you any anxiety? Were you found out? If you weren't found out, did you regret lying?
6. Have you ever felt manipulated by a friend into doing something you didn't want to do? Did you end up going along with it or did you say no?
7. Have you ever found yourself in a situation that, had someone been looking at it from the outside, would have seemed bizarre? Do you think you would have been able to explain rationally how you got into that situation?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The discussion questions and activities below mainly focus on opening up a discussion about online safety, communication, self-esteem and peer pressure.

We're all living our lives and interacting with others online more and more, and we want those interactions to be positive and safe. The aim of these questions isn't to create fear, or to stop online use, but to help raise awareness in students and teen readers (and adults too!) about how to think before posting, and to create a safe and private atmosphere for your online interactions.

Through reading Taylor's first-person account of her emotions, decisions and actions, readers can examine their own responses. What would you do if you were in Taylor's situation?

1. *'He was at the last Winter Olympics! We were in the same crowd, watching Chumpy Pullin's event. Can you believe it? . . . And we were in the same crowd at Pink's concert, too. We have the same photos. It's like it's meant to be. You know? Like those movies where two soulmates keep crossing paths, destined to meet, and then one day they do*

and everything about it is perfect. What are the odds of meeting a guy like that on Mysterychat? It must be like four gazillion to one.' (p. 25)

Think about your social media accounts, and google yourself – what information about you can be found online? Now read the police explanation of how Jacob groomed Sierra on pp. 107–108. How does that change your perspective on what can be learned about you online, and how a stranger might use that information to make it seem as though you have lots in common?

2. *'I'm keeping it casual and brief, just in case. It's always easy to extend a date, but so awkward to cut one short.'* (p. 30) *'We thought outside Hummingbird Cupcakes and then we'd go for a juice . . . I originally made it that way, thinking that we should plan to make it a quick first meeting . . .'* (p. 41) Sierra had the right idea in keeping her first date in an open and public area. What else could she have done to ensure her safety when first meeting someone she previously only knew online? Where did she go wrong in her choices? What role did Taylor play in putting her friend in danger?
 3. *'She's going to get caught . . . But this time you're going to get dragged down with her. That's what peeves me most. She doesn't care who else gets into trouble, as long as she's having a good time.'* *'Going into the city for a few hours on a Friday night is hardly the worst thing in the world. And I won't even have to lie for her. I'll just tell Mum I'm going around to your place after school. Sierra will be with me when I go home. It all works.'* (p. 38) Should Taylor have agreed to help Sierra conceal her date? What pressure was she under to do so? How did she rationalise it to herself?
 4. *'I'm going jogging. I want to lose weight.'* *'How much?'* *'Um . . . not sure. I just want to look good in a bikini.'* *She laughs. 'We all want to look good in a bikini. As long as you do it sensibly and slowly, that's great. Good for you.'* *She doesn't say I don't need to.* (p. 16) Why does Taylor want to lose weight? From your reading of her, do you think she needed to? What do you think of what her mum tells her? Was Mum sending a positive message or not?
- How did Taylor's lack of self-esteem contribute to the decisions she made in the book?
5. *'Do you want to talk about what happened?' She never pushes me. After Dad died we had some counselling sessions together and one of the exercises was about not pushing a person to talk. It's supposed to allow the person who's upset time to work out how they feel without being pressured to discuss it.* (p. 43) Taylor has had some counselling in the past, and sometimes her counsellor's strategies help Taylor to deal with her present problems. Why do you think not pushing someone to talk can be helpful?
 6. *'Oh my god! I'm having the best time! He's a-ma-zing! . . . He's older than eighteen, but hey, I lied about my age too, so I guess we're even. And older guys are so much hotter! Oh my god, Tay, we're already making out!'* (p. 49) Can you identify any warning signs in what Sierra tells Taylor?
 7. *'I'm not asking you to lie, just say nothing.'* (p. 50) Is saying nothing the same as lying, or a form of lying? Where should you draw the line?
 8. *'Well, she betrayed me that time with Matt. And I lied for her . . . She didn't come back when she told me she would and I spent the whole time freaking out. She didn't give a shit if I got into trouble. And clearly she doesn't give a shit about getting Taylor into trouble, either. What's Tay supposed to do now?'* (p. 51) Riley has been manipulated by Sierra before, and feels betrayed. What do you think would have happened to Taylor and Sierra's friendship if Sierra had returned from her date? Would Taylor have been able to trust Sierra again?
 9. *'Did she show?'* *'No . . . I don't know what to do.'* *'Nothing! If Rachel calls, just tell her the truth.'* *'Yeah, but that still gets me into heaps of trouble. Mum'll kill me.'* *'Play dumb then. Say you have no idea where she is. At no stage was she ever staying at your place. You know nothing.'* (p. 55) Taylor is in agony over the weekend, wondering when Sierra will show up and what she should do – and Callum feels the same way. What would you have done in this situation? Would you have told someone earlier than Taylor does?

What were the factors that held her back? What makes her realise something is really wrong?

10. Callum, Joel and Riley all have the chance to tell Rachel that Sierra is missing. Why do they think the choice of whether to tell or not is Taylor's and not theirs?
11. Read about Taylor talking to her counsellor on p. 129, and Taylor's blog post on p. 230. What is survivor guilt? Why does the counsellor tell Taylor that she must allow herself to feel?
12. Read the song lyrics on p. 139. Why do they resonate so strongly for Taylor? What books have you read or movies have you seen where a girl is attracted to a 'bad boy'? What effect do you think the prevalence of this stereotype has on our culture? Do you think it could contribute to attitudes towards women in society, and tolerance of violence towards women?
13. *Have you ever ignored a bad feeling? Have you ever regretted doing so? How do we know when to act on a feeling and when to ignore it? When should we speak up to protect our friends?* (p. 206) Taylor's questions on the website cut to the heart of what has happened. How would you answer them?
14. What is the significance of the way the author describes the murderer's house on p. 259–260? Why did the author choose to describe it this way?

ACTIVITIES

- Complete the '**Are you online-insible or risk?**' quiz, which is like the one Taylor posts on the Risk website.
 - With a trusted friend, check out each other's social media profiles and posts such as those on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. See if you can identify things that might put your friend at risk.
 - Have your own discussion on the topic 'Are you open to meeting someone online?' (See pp. 173–175.)
 - Make posters for your school or class with tips for being safe online.
 - Write a blog post that could go on Taylor's Risk website about something you've done that could be considered risky; or about how you feel after reading Taylor's story.
- Write a blog post from the perspective of one of the other characters, such as Riley or Joel or Rachel. How does that character view the events of the book? How are they feeling at the end of the story?
 - Split into teams and have a classroom debate on some of the complex issues surrounding online activities. Here are some possible topics:
 - That the government is/isn't doing enough to ensure our online safety.
 - That teenagers should/shouldn't be banned from social media until they are 15.
 - That the government has/does not have the right to keep track of every person's internet activity.

RESOURCES

For more information about online safety and other teen issues, try these websites:

- <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Teens.aspx> (a great place for teens to find out more)
- <https://www.staysmartonline.gov.au/>
- <http://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/teens.html> (information for parents)
- <http://www.headspace.org.au/> (National Youth Mental Health Foundation)
- www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/04/15/online-and-out-there-how-children-view-privacy-differently-adults (this article provides an excellent summary of how teens are using the internet and how our concept of privacy is changing)

GETTING HELP

If you or someone you know is going through a tough situation that you don't feel comfortable talking about with friends or family, you can find help elsewhere. Reach out to a counsellor on a free anonymous hotline or website.

- www.beyondblue.org.au or 1300 22 4636
- www.kidshelp.com.au or 1800 55 1800
- www.lifeline.org.au or 13 11 14

Are you online-invisible or risk?

We spend so much of our lives online. Are you taking risks you don't know about? Take the quiz to find out . . .

Question	Yes	No
Have you ever given your contact details to someone you've only met online, or mentioned your personal details in a public post?		
Have you ever posted a photograph online that has features that could be used to identify the location? (For example, you're wearing school uniform, or there's an easily identifiable place in the background.)		
Is the geotagging option turned on in your phone, so that posts to social media sites include your location?		
Do your friends post things you might not find out about until later, or tag you in their posts?		
Do you monitor the privacy settings for your social media accounts?		
Have you changed your privacy settings so that only your friends and family can see your posts, not everyone?		
Have you used an email address that can be seen publicly online that uses your personal details (such as your full name or school)?		
Could your online identity or nickname be seen as suggestive or inappropriate?		
Have you ever responded to someone online who made you feel uncomfortable?		
Have you ever given a password to an online site to someone else?		
Have you ever arranged to meet someone that you've only talked to online?		

Mostly Yes: Your activities online are putting you at risk now and in the future. Yikes! Make some time to check your phone and social media privacy settings, consider deleting posts that identify you, change your passwords, and think about what messages you're sending next time you post.

Mostly No: Great work keeping yourself safe online. You're mostly invisible to those who might use your information to do you harm. Remember to stay alert when you post things that might be seen by others.

A Mix of Yes and No: You're mindful of online safety sometimes, but other times you might forget or you don't know the danger you could be putting yourself in. Think about how you can be more aware of online safety, see what you can do to make your online life more private, and always think before you post.

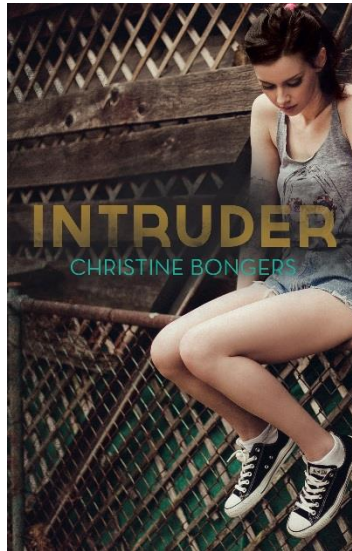
FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



One True Thing
by Nicole Hayes

Why this story? Another Melbourne story, this time focusing on gender, media, politics and family secrets.

Frankie is used to being a politician's daughter, but with her mum now running for Premier, life's a whole lot crazier than usual. All Frankie wants is to lose herself in her music. So when her best friend, Kessie, invites a student journo to interview the band, Frankie is less than thrilled. But Jake's easy to talk to, and he seems to really like Frankie. That doesn't stop her from wondering if he's just after the ultimate scoop, especially when photos surface of Frankie's mum having a secret rendezvous with a younger man. With her family falling apart around her, Frankie is determined to find out the truth – even if it means losing Jake.



Intruder
by Christine Bongers

Why this story? This heartwarming CBCA shortlisted book gets to the core of what it means to be safe.

Kat Jones is woken by an intruder looming over her bed. She's saved by Edwina – the neighbour Kat believes betrayed her dying mother.

Her dad issues an ultimatum. Either spend nights next door, or accept another intruder in her life – Hercules, the world's ugliest guard dog. It's a no-brainer, even for dog-phobic Kat.

When she meets adorkable Al at the dog park, finally Kat has someone to talk to, someone who cares.

But the prowler isn't finished with Kat. To stop him, she needs Edwina's help . . . and what Kat learns could mend fences – or break her fragile family apart forever.



The Pause
by John Larkin

Why this story? Like *Risk*, an unflinching look at a tragedy that could have been averted.

Declan seems to have it all: a family that loves him, friends he's known for years, a beautiful girlfriend. But there's something in his past that won't go away, that scratches at his thoughts when he's at his most vulnerable. Declan feels as if nothing will take away the pain that he has buried deep inside for so long. So he makes the only decision he thinks he has left: the decision to end it all.

Or does he? As the train approaches and Declan teeters at the edge of the platform, two versions of his life are revealed. In one, Declan watches as his body is destroyed and the lives of those who loved him unravel. In the other, Declan pauses before he jumps. And this makes all the difference.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
Risk	Fleur Ferris	9780857986474	8-10	\$19.99		
One True Thing	Nicole Hayes	9780857986887	7-10	\$19.99		
The Pause	John Larkin	9780857981707	9-12	\$19.99		
Intruder	Christine Bongers	9780857983763	7-10	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

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