

The Benefits of Risky Play



Dear Families,

This year, we are highlighting the benefits of risky play. Research tells us risky outdoor play has diminished over time due to increasing concerns regarding child safety and an emphasis on injury prevention.

Risky play is defined as a form of play that is thrilling and exciting, which involves uncertainty, unpredictability, and varying degrees of risk-taking.

WHY RISKY PLAY?

- Risky play is important for children's development, health, and well-being. Risky play supports increased resilience, self-regulation, and skills for coping with stress.
- Children naturally seek risky play. They experience excitement and fear during risky play, and healthy risk taking has been acknowledged as an important part of children's play.
- Children are capable and competent and learn to balance risky play with their own safety and safety of others.
- Taking risks in play is a natural coping mechanism, which helps to reduce fears and tackle phobias.
- Children who take part in adventurous play, like climbing trees, grow socially, emotionally, physically, and creatively. They also build important skills like problem-solving and resilience.

“The adult role is to remove or point out the hazards that children do not see, to make the play and learning opportunities as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.”

FURTHER READING

Learning Outdoors: Benefits | Risks. Nature Play SA. *Freely available to read and download via web.*

Risk in Outdoor Play and Why a Balanced Approach is Needed by Tim Gill. *Freely available to read via web.*

Talking about practice: Adventurous play— Developing a culture of risky play. National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program. *Freely available to read via web.*

REFERENCES

Categorising Risky Play - How Can We Identify Risk-Taking in Children's Play? E. B. H. Sandseter, 2007.

Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development. M. Brussoni, L. Olsen, I. Pike, D. Sleet, 2012.

Individual differences in children's risk perception and appraisals in outdoor play environments. H. Little, S. Wyver, 2010.

Benefits and Risks of Tree Climbing on Child Development and Resiliency. Carla Gull, Suzanne Levenson Goldstein, Tricia Rosengarten, 2018.

Children's Risky Play from an Evolutionary Perspective: The Anti-Phobic Effects of Thrilling Experiences. E. B. H. Sandseter, L. Kennair, 2011.

Adventurous Play as a Mechanism for Reducing Risk for Childhood Anxiety: A Conceptual Model. Helen F. Dodd, Kathryn J. Lester, 2020.





WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RISKS AND HAZARDS?

Risky play helps kids learn judgment and decision-making by taking calculated risks in a safe setting. They can explore and push themselves while staying safe. **Hazards** are dangers that kids can't predict which should be pointed out or removed.



WHAT IS RISKY PLAY?

- **Play at Great Heights:** Scaling heights like trees, playground structures, or rocks.
- **Play at Rapid Speeds:** Opportunities to run, swing, bicycle, skate, roll, and spin at speed.
- **Play With Real Tools:** Opportunities to use tools like hammers, saws, rope or other real tools.
- **Rough-and-Tumble Play:** Physical play that involves wrestling, play fighting, or other forms of rough play.
- **Exploring Dangerous Elements:** Supervised interactions with water, fire, tools, or other risky elements.
- **Play where the children can 'disappear'/get lost:** Opportunities to play and explore in unfamiliar spaces alone or in a small group.

**INSTEAD OF "BE CAREFUL",
TRY THIS INSTEAD:**

"What is your plan?"

"Take your time."

"Do you feel safe there?"

"What is your next move?"

"I'm here if you need me."

"Have you checked who else is
around you?"

