

Risky Play

What do we mean by Risky Play?

The term 'risky play' is often used but is still either not fully understood or put in to practice. So what does risky play actually mean? Play Wales (2008) states that play means '...providing opportunities for all children to encounter or create uncertainty, unpredictability, and potential hazards as part of their play. We do not mean putting children in danger of serious harm.'

'Good risks and hazards in play provision are those that engage and challenge children, and support their growth, learning and development. These might include... loose materials that give children the chance to create and destroy constructions using their skill, creativity and imagination. Bad risks and hazards are those that are difficult or impossible for children to assess for themselves, and that have no obvious benefits. These might include sharp edges or points on equipment, weak structures that may collapse, and items that include traps for heads or fingers.' (Play England, 2007)

A risky play situation for one child might be different to that of another but once you get to know a child, you can support them to take appropriate risks in their play. Staff have a duty of care towards children so it is important that risk assessments are carefully carried out first; remember risk assessments are used to evidence that practitioners have considered and eliminated *significant* risks to children, not to eradicate all risks entirely.

Why is risky play important?

It is widely known that children are now given less opportunities to engage in risky play than the children of previous generations. So what exactly are modern children missing out on?

'Children and young people themselves recognise that 'you can't make everything safe' and that a balance is needed between risks and fun. Children recognise that knowing about risks and how to manage them is an essential part of growing up... Through play, children are able to learn about risks and use their own initiative. If children and young people are not allowed to explore and learn through playing and taking part in positive activities, they will not learn how to judge risks and manage them for themselves. These skills learnt through play and other activities can act as a powerful form of prevention in other situations where children and young people are at risk.' (Play England, 2007)

'It is argued that taking risks can have positive implications in terms of children's developmental, social and emotional needs, as well as their overall health. By providing the opportunities for children to manage their own risks in a controlled environment, they will learn vital life skills needed for adulthood, and gain the experience needed to face the unpredictable nature of the world (Gill, 2007)... Risk taking is considered to have further benefits, which contribute to the development of desirable personality traits, including creativity (Susa and Benedict in Ball, 2002)... Dweck (2000) states that encouraging children to enjoy challenges rather than to shy away from them could also increase their persistence and learning abilities.'

Hazards, then, especially for children and young people, have some value in that they can be an opportunity for learning.