



POLICY

Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning

RELATED DOCUMENTS

TCEC Workplace Health and Safety Policy
School/College Workplace Health and Safety Policy
School/College Risk Management Policy
School/College Procurement Policy
School/College Excursion Policy
Archdiocese of Hobart, Workplace Health and Safety Policy
Archdiocese of Hobart, Risk Management Policy

Sports Risk Management Guidelines
COP How to Manage Health and Safety Risks
COP Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination

Policy No: 05:2013



Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning Policy

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1. RATIONALE

This Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning Policy document has been formulated to support the work of those involved in the provision and use of play spaces within our schools and in providing positive learning experiences outside of the classroom and school environment. The spirit and intent of the Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning Policy is to ensure that all parties are aware of their obligations both in providing rich, safe and inspiring play spaces to enable children to grow and develop to their full potential in accordance with our Gospel values while ensuring the safest possible environment for those experiences.

The policy is designed to ensure Work Health and Safety requirements are met and reinvigorate the play spaces and outdoor learning experiences as areas for learning complete with reasonable, and appropriately identified, controlled or managed risk-taking, aimed at developing skills and understandings.

"Although the term 'risk-taking' often has negative connotations, the reality is that the willingness to engage in some (appropriately managed or controlled) risky activities provides opportunities to learn new skills, try new behaviours and ultimately reach our potential. Challenge and risk, in particular during outdoor play, allows children to test the limits of their physical, intellectual and social development" (Little, H & Wyver, S, 2009).

2. POLICY

Students in our schools will be provided with valuable learning experiences both within the school grounds and on excursions. These experiences will not be free of all risk but will be experiences where risk-benefit analysis has shown that the benefits of the experience and the appropriate control or management of these risks outweigh the reasonable risks which may be involved. Where risks are identified reasonably practicable steps will be taken to eliminate unacceptable risks and/or manage/control acceptable risks through management of the activity.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1. Outdoor learning

Learning experiences which take place outside of the classroom or school buildings. These may be onsite or offsite, play or planned experiences.

3.2. Play

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.” (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group 2005)

3.3. Excursions

School excursions are structured learning experiences provided by, or under the auspices of, the school which are conducted external to the school site.

3.4. Hazards

A situation or thing that has the potential to harm a person

3.5. Risk

The possibility that harm (death, injury or illness) might occur when exposed to a hazard.

3.6. Risk Management Process

Taking action to eliminate health and safety risk so far as is reasonably practicable and if that is not possible, minimising the risks so far as is reasonably practicable. Eliminating a hazard will also eliminate any risks associated with that hazard. In accordance with Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice.

3.7. Reasonable Risk-taking

'Reasonable risk taking' means the responsible person has recognised the risk, examined the hazards, balanced the likelihood of an accident happening against the severity of the harm that would take place if it did happen, and taken the appropriate action to control or manage the risk (Knight, S. 2011. P 103).

3.8. Risk-benefit

An analysis of the benefits of an activity balanced against an estimation of the risks of that activity.

4. Roles

Role of the Principal

The Principal has the responsibility to ensure they have current knowledge and awareness of age appropriate safety management practice for outdoor learning and excursions, and be aware of the type of experiences being offered by their school. Furthermore they shall use appropriate resources and processes to eliminate unacceptable risks and appropriately manage or control suitable learning experiences. Finally they shall review and monitor the impact of this Policy on learning opportunities and WHS outcomes.

The Principal shall ensure:

- that all documentation is completed including a Risk Assessment and, if required, a Risk Benefit Analysis, and wider WHS practices as recommended in relevant Codes of Practice, such as consultation, coordination and cooperation.
- that learning opportunities are not being restricted by fear of litigation around WHS concerns
- educators and parents are aware of the conditions that require a risk benefit analysis to be carried out

For outdoor learning within the school a Risk Assessment and, if required, a Risk Benefit Analysis should be carried out when the space is created or new items included or conditions change. An ongoing review of the area shall be carried out to ensure risks are being controlled as planned as per the Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice.

Role of the teacher and teacher assistant/other staff

The staff planning for outdoor play or learning have the responsibility for providing quality learning experiences and this is supported by:

- managing risks by eliminating health and safety risks so far as is reasonably practicable, and if it is not reasonably practicable to do so, to minimise those risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

In the case of excursions full documentation shall accompany an application to the Principal for the event. This should include the identified risks and the management strategies to be employed. This documentation would result from the Risk Management Process.

For outdoor play, the Risk Management Process would be ongoing and require periodic planned, as well as timely reviews of control measures to ensure the safety of the students.

Role of Parents

Parents shall take reasonable care of their health and safety and that their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others. They shall comply with any reasonable instruction given by the School and participate in consultation, cooperation and coordination of activities guided by this Policy.

Role of Students

Students shall take reasonable care of their health and safety and that their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others. Students shall also follow any reasonable instruction given by the School to comply with this Policy.

5. Background:

*Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, **the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.***

- Play is important for children's well-being and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities the goal is not to eliminate all risk, only the unreasonable risk

- Those providing play opportunities should focus on managing or controlling the unacceptable risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion

Perceptions or interpretations of WHS requirements have resulted in decisions to curtail or cancel some activities rather than take steps to appropriately control or manage identified risks. This has resulted in the very real risk that children are not being provided with learning opportunities that are essential for their physical, emotional and intellectual development.

6. PRINCIPLES

Play and exploration is a fundamental human right for all children, regardless of age, gender, culture, social class or disability. This needs to be reflected in the range of play environments and outdoor learning opportunities we offer children to ensure that all are able to engage in experiences that help improve their quality of life.

Those working with children shall ensure that they undertake a risk management process as set out in the Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice.

While elimination of hazards is the preference it may not be possible “if doing so means that you cannot make the end product or deliver the service” (Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice). In this case the product or service is education. It is our responsibility to educate children to learn to take informed and reasonable risk.

The Victorian Health Foundation Study “Nothing but fear itself” (2010) noted the following benefits of physical activity:

- 1 Children learn to regulate their emotions
- 2 Children learn to engage in exploratory behaviour
- 3 Children learn to communicate effectively
- 4 Children become more self-directed
- 5 Children develop greater intellectual flexibility

- 6 Children come to possess some degree of introspection, and
- 7 Children develop greater self-efficacy in meeting life's challenges

They also note the health benefits of physical activity including decreased obesity and diabetes rates, improved cardiovascular function and lower rates of mental health problems.

Tim Gill (2007) poses four arguments in support of risk in activity:

- 1 Helping children to learn to manage risk (understanding safety)
- 2 Feeding children's innate need for risk with reasonable risks in order to prevent them finding greater un-managed risks for themselves
- 3 Health and developmental benefits
- 4 Developmental benefits including the building of character and personality traits such as resilience and self-reliance

Through PLAY and outdoor experiences children are given the opportunity to:

- Take informed and reasonable risks and make mistakes
- Make informed and reasonable choices that involve challenge
- Use a range of tools and equipment safely
- Experience a range of activities which will encourage interest and curiosity
- Be assisted to build the confidence to take manageable and controllable risks
- Develop an understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges
- Learn to assess risks for themselves with help from adults

7. REQUIREMENTS

Each school seeks to do all that is reasonably practicable to:

- Manage or control the risks in children's playing and outdoor learning but not allow unreasonable and/or overly pedantic risk management processes to be the guiding principle when creating play spaces and facilities and planning excursions.
- Ensure that policy development, planning and decision making and documentation of these supports children's play and quality outdoor learning experiences .
- Develop and provide to parents, clear statements of beliefs around play provision and outdoor learning provision which include a statement outlining how we ensure risks are

assessed and unacceptable risks removed while acceptable risk is managed or controlled appropriately.

- Ensure all staff understand the importance of play and outdoor experiences in children's lives and how to reconcile the WHS requirements and the learning needs of students.

8. Risk-Benefit Analysis

The law imposes a duty on a person to eliminate the risk to health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable, and if not reasonably practicable to do so, to minimise the risk as far as is reasonably practicable this does not mean eliminating all risks. The emphasis should be on eliminating unacceptable risks and managing or controlling acceptable risks. It follows that, for every experience, an appropriate person should decide if the balance between risk and opportunity is appropriate for the learners concerned.

Risk/benefit analysis consciously balances the benefits of an experience against the intrinsic risks along with risk assessment.

Educators taking children and young people outdoors are uniquely placed to manage this process. They should adopt an *enabling* attitude towards outdoor learning that identifies exciting, creative opportunities for learning.

Where appropriate they should use published guidance and the advice of senior staff and specialists to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

Sometimes in planning, eliminating or controlling a hazard may seem so daunting that offering the experience seems impossible. That is the point for serious consideration involving appropriate consultation, coordination and cooperation amongst relevant duty holders but not necessarily the moment to cancel plans.

Children and young people should not be denied an experience simply because a hazard could not be completely eliminated. A venture where all conceivable risk has been eliminated removes the opportunities for learners to develop their own strategies and attitudes towards risk this type of action can of itself create other risks. Learners should be at the centre of the risk management process from the outset.

Risk has both positive and negative aspects. With careful thought and planning it is possible to

remove unreasonable risks and manage or control hazards arising out of a venture without extinguishing the possibility of personal adventure at the heart of outdoor learning.

In planning and considering risks and benefits it is important to consider:

- Is the level of challenge appropriate to the learner group?
- How will risks be assessed and balanced against the benefits that can be expected?
- Can the rationale for this experience be justified even if events don't go according to plan?
- Are the management arrangements appropriate to the location selected?
- Are the leadership and supervisory staff appropriately skilled, qualified and experienced?
- Are there any relevant examples of good practice that we can draw on?

9. Myths re risks

Health and safety laws exist to protect workers and others from death, serious injury and ill health at work, not to ruin children's playtime or outdoor learning experiences. **We have identified that in some cases not providing children with play or outdoor learning experiences may of itself create risk.**

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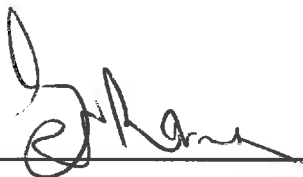
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Safe Work Australia How to manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice

SIGNED: 
TCEC Chairperson

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Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning

Executive Summary

Tim Gill in his book, *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society* argues that childhood is being undermined by the growth of risk aversion. This restricts children's play, limits their freedom of movement, corrodes their relationships with adults and constrains their exploration of physical, social and virtual worlds.

Here in Tasmania our play spaces and outdoor learning experiences are being impacted by the fear school leaders hold of Health and Safety 'rules'. These 'rules' are often no more than myth and yet their impact on children and their development is real.

This policy aims to redress the balance between care and risk in order that children are able to grow and develop skills and understandings that will assist them to be healthy, strong and able to assess risk for themselves into the future.

Internationally there has been much research into the impact of the elimination of risk on children's physical, intellectual and emotional growth and development. This research warns of the dangers of wrapping children in cotton wool in an attempt to protect them and claims the result of such action will in fact be an increase in risk as children do not develop skills and have experiences from which they learn their physical boundaries, the limits of their abilities and the skills to avoid excessive and unnecessary risk. Neither will they learn to extend themselves, to push harder, to go further than they have before.

In the United Kingdom the Health and Safety Executive has been working to eliminate the over-protection of children and to ensure myths are not taken as truth. Their work provides guidance and direction for us here in Australia.

These documents aim to provide clarification of the difference between Health and Safety facts and fiction when it comes to outdoor learning (including play), to guide educators in making common sense decisions about activities and how to minimise extreme risk and not minimise experiences and learning. Providing this clarification will assist schools to provide quality experiences in order that children "have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10).



CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks¹ and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it about

¹ The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chargot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user.
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed.
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance *does not* mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers² should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

² Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced.
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.
15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.



London Play Briefing

November 2006 (updated February 2009)

Risk / Benefit Assessment in Play: it's not rocket science! A light-hearted look at a serious issue

The Health and Safety Executive are very concerned about the reduction in risky play opportunities, and have publicised the fact that good quality risk assessments can help play providers to keep or but back the risky play children need to undertake to learn about risk for themselves. Leaflets and practical examples on Risk Assessment are on their website - www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm. Access all the risk assessments that Sheffield City Council make available for schools to use in organising activities: www.thornbridgeoutdoors.co.uk/genericrisk.htm Here, London Play balances risk against benefit to children, this is different to simply removing all risks to children.

We do Risk Assessment all the time without realising it - every time we cross the road, meet someone new to us, drive anywhere or find something tasty in the fridge a day over the sell by date. They are a legal responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act - Management must ensure they are done properly, usually by instructing a site or setting manager to do it, so don't shirk it. You don't need a training course, (although they are useful), you do need to share with colleagues, children, staff, managers, volunteers and parents. Put it up on the wall for all to see, get the children to work on them themselves - (perhaps with illustrations of the more unlikely outcomes to make it interesting).

A written risk assessment is not difficult, and can help share concerns with parents and colleagues. List the possible problems in a column, then next to that note the probable result, then the likelihood, then what can be done to avoid the problem, lastly assign a value to each line and decide if the risk is outweighed by the value of the experience. It is important that they are seen as public documents, not stuffed in an office filing cabinet and forgotten. Put them up on the wall for all to see and comment on, they should be seen as a collaborative effort, reached by consensus and after discussion.

Make them an ongoing, live-action type of work, not an excuse to hide in the office (or work from home). There is no need to restrict every activity that arises spontaneously until they are risk assessed, just think it through as you watch the play develop, and then intervene to restrict only if obviously dangerous. If colleagues or managers misuse the risk assessment process to avoid doing something they don't like - they need a holiday, perhaps a long one.

Alan Sutton, Policy Officer - email alan@londonplay.org.uk

Possible problem or hazard	Possible Result or outcome – worst case scenario	Likelihood – Risk assess for different age/ability groups	Is risk apparent and controllable to children participating?	Reasonable and Practical Steps available to avoid or reduce problem	Value of allowing activity	Decision (note any restriction/exclusion)
Playfighting with wooden swords	bruising	Low BUT could rise – if bad temper develops	yes	1 Ensure all are very blunt. 2 discuss need for fair play 3 only allow under active supervision	Developing dexterity, strength, historical understanding. Fun	Signed .. Date Allow BUT supervise to ensure no bad tempers
Playfighting with wooden swords	Centre is accused of facilitating fighting	High	yes	Discuss with all concerned to ensure it is happening only to experience an important facet of cultural heritage**, and not to settle a grudge	As above	Allow (Risk assessment is for children's health and safety, not to centre's reputation)
Playfighting with real swords	death	Low to medium	no	Confiscate swords and hand over to police	none	Not allowed
Outdoor play during which a branch may fall from a tree unexpectedly	Death or serious injury	Very low	no	1 No outdoor play under trees in gale force winds 2 remove any dead branches	Outdoor play is very important	Allow
Jumping from a 5 foot high wall	Broken bones	Low BUT medium with younger children	Yes BUT not with very gullible young children if bullied into it by others	1 supervise to begin with 2 ensure informal peer risk assessment happens (older or more able kids explain to others how to do it- hit the ground running, with bent knees and finish with parachutists roll)	Developing judgement, ability, Older ones take responsibility for younger peers	Allow for over 7's only
Poisoning with exterior paint/wood preserver/domestic chemicals	Illness, hospitalisation, long term tissue damage	unsure	no	1 Check contents, use COSHH (control of substances hazardous to health) information sheets from manufacturers 2 use recommended protective clothing etc 3 Store out of reach of children	Low, as not a play activity	Use only by trained/competent adults

Possible problem or hazard	Possible Result or outcome – worst case scenario	Likelihood – Risk assess for different age/ability groups	Is risk apparent and controllable to children participating?	Reasonable and Practical Steps available to avoid or reduce problem	Value of allowing activity	Decision (note any restriction/exclusion) Signed .. Date
Bead stuck up nose	Child distressed, visit to casualty to remove	Low BUT higher with younger children	no	It is impossible to control, if you tell them not to, they will be more likely to do it	Bead work is a popular and inexpensive craft activity	Allow
Drowning in paddling pool	death	Very low UNLESS specific medical problem identified	yes	1 Ensure all medical records checked for any children with epilepsy/fits/sudden loss of consciousness. 2 supervise	Water play is great fun	Allow BUT close (unobtrusive to avoid scapegoating) supervision of any children at higher risk
Staff spend all their time on doing risk assessments	No play or fun, children play somewhere better	High (especially if desperate for promotion to management level)	yes	Relax – don't do it	1 Keep OFSTED at bay 2 Head office Manager cannot visit as too busy checking and filing risk assessments	Not allowed (unless Senior manager always present and willing to be tied up and have wet sponges thrown at them by children)

Managing Risk in Outdoor Learning Experiences

Introduction

Fear of risk has impacted on the provision of outdoor learning experiences. Yet children and young people continue to seek adventure and challenge. Adult increasing anxiety over safety must be balanced with the need to provide rich outdoor learning experiences that enhance student learning and skill development.

Position Statement – Tasmanian Catholic Schools and Colleges

Outdoor learning experiences, well constructed, well planned and responsibly managed, will contribute to the wellbeing of all students and enable them to become resilient, confident and creative individual learners, responsible citizens and successful learners who value the environment and will be better able to contribute positively to society.

Context

An outdoor education program may have a range of outcomes. Program outcomes may focus on academic, social, or skill development or a combination of these depending upon the student group.

Outdoor education may include excursions to offsite venues, walks, camps and specific outdoor education programs such as water sports, bushwalking etc.

The benefits of outdoor education outweigh the risk of an accident occurring. Provided appropriate procedures are followed the benefits (along with those of the reaching program) include:

- Opportunities for children and young people to learn about risks
- Experiences of freedom
- Opportunities to learn about and take responsibility for their own safety and well-being as they grow
- Building confidence



A mindset that is solely focused on safety does students no favours. Rather than keeping them safe, it can lead to them not being provided with experiences that will assist in developing resilience, understand how to handle challenges, learn how to manage risks for themselves. A reasonable and proportionate approach to safety is what is required.

“A degree of risk – properly managed- is not only inevitable, but positively desirable” (Gill, T. 2010)



Adventurous activities make demands on children and may provide physical or skill-based challenges. They also develop personal qualities such as perseverance, problem solving and resilience.

One of the ways that we can help children to prepare for adult life is to expose them to managed risk, while supporting them in learning how to cope. For instance, we help children to learn how to manage the risk of drowning not by keeping them away from the sea, rivers or lakes, but by teaching them how to swim, and how to manage the water environment. Outdoor education often takes an incremental approach to risk, gradually increasing children's exposure as they gain confidence,

with self-management, sound judgement and self-reliance as the ultimate goals. (Gill, T. 2010)

Outdoor activities are not excessively dangerous in fact statistics show that children on excursions are no more at risk than the students who remain at school.

Outdoor activities are also highly beneficial for learning and development. "Challenge and risk, in particular during outdoor play, allows children to test the limits of their physical, intellectual and social development" (Little & Wyver 2008).

An exaggeration of the risks involved in many common childhood pursuits has resulted in children being denied the opportunity to engage in many worthwhile activities that facilitate their learning and development (Furedi, 2001).

Fear of risk, of injury or disaster has increased in the last decade to the point that fear itself is the greater risk to our health than the issues we are fearing (Furedi 2007). One of the greatest fears for schools and organisations is not damage to students (we are one of the safest places for children to be) but to reputation and the good name of the



school or organisation.

We need to be clear when making decisions not to proceed with activities about the reasons – health and safety? Or litigation and loss of public face?

Educating for sustainability and play

"No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

Sir David Attenborough

Adults who engage with nature from a young age are more likely to be motivated to protect the environment. The critical age for engagement appears to be before 12 years.

In order to have scientists who work to discover more about the environment we need children who are exploring, investigating and getting deeply involved with all that nature has to offer.

Widespread evidence suggests that the strongest environmental sensibilities in adulthood stem from childhood experiences of unstructured play in natural environments, including interactive (potentially damaging) activities. (Maudsley, M. 2007)

Managing risk in play provision

According to statistics out of the UK the most dangerous place for a child to be is at home. And yet we continue to assume that 'outside' is a dangerous place for children to be.

In Australia the statistics are similar:

ACTIVITY AND LOCATION WHEN INJURED

Australian children are generally physically active. Among 498,000 children aged 5-14 years who reported being injured recently, the most common activities these children had been undertaking at the time of injury were leisure activities (e.g. playing non-organised sport or games), and organised sports. In 2001, half of all recent injuries for children this age (51%) occurred during leisure activities, and around a third (27%) while children were playing sports. A further 17% occurred while attending school (Clapperton A. et al 2003).

The most common locations at which 5-14 year olds received injuries were outside their own or someone else's home (32%), at school (30%), at a sports facility (20%), or inside their own or someone else's home (16%). (ABS)

In June 2006, there were 4 million children aged under 15 years in Australia, representing one-fifth (19%) of the total population (ABS 2006a). Health gains brought about by better living conditions, education, medical care and vaccination would suggest that this generation of children should be the healthiest ever (Patton et al. 2005). However, there are emerging concerns related to rapid social change and the associated new morbidities such as increasing levels of behavioural, developmental, mental health and social problems (AIHW 2006). Early childhood in particular has become a key priority for Australian government and non-government organisations (AIHW 2006).

HEALTH CONDITIONS

- In 2004-05, 41% of children aged under 15 years had a long-term health condition compared with 44% in 2001 (ABS 2006 & ABS 2002).
- Boys (44%) were more likely than girls (38%) to have a long term health condition.
- Diseases of the respiratory system were reported for 19% of children - the main conditions were asthma (12%), hayfever and allergic rhinitis (8%) and chronic sinusitis (3%).
- Diseases of the eye and adnexa were reported for 10% of children - the main conditions were long

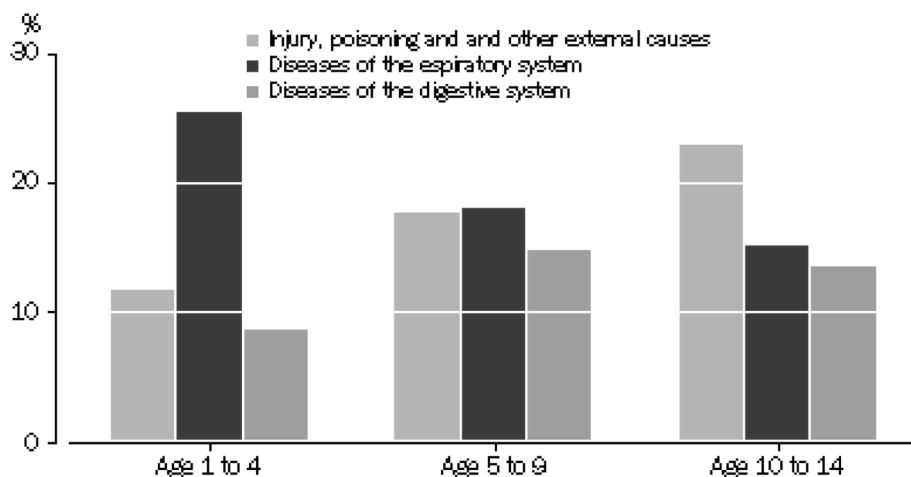
sightedness (4%) and short sightedness (4%).

- Mental and behavioural problems were reported for 7% of children overall - these main conditions were behavioural & emotional problems with usual onset in childhood or adolescence (3%) and problems of psychological development (3%).

HOSPITALISATION

- Of total hospital separations in 2004-05, 528,100 (8%) involved children aged under 15 years (AIHW 2007).
- Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period (38%) and diseases of the respiratory system (13%) were the main causes of hospitalisation for children under one year of age (AIHW 2007).
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- Among children, rates of hospitalisation due to injury increased with age and were higher for boys than for girls (ABS 2005a).
- Other leading causes for hospitalisation among children included disorders related to short gestation and low birthweight (for children aged under five years) and chronic diseases of tonsils and adenoids (AIHW 2006).

Major reasons for hospital separations for children aged 1-14 years, 2004-05



Source: AIHW, National Hospital Morbidity Database.

The ABS data suggests that schools are actually safer places for children to be than their own homes and this despite the numbers of children in schools. Yet we continue to respond with fear when planning excursions and outdoor learning experiences, seemingly intent on reducing all risks and protecting children from normal bumps, grazes and minor injury. The table above shows an increase in injuries as children grow older, perhaps due to a lack of experience with risk in the earlier

years?

Tim Gill calls for “the wholesale rejection of the philosophy of protection.” In its place, he argues we should embrace risk, uncertainty and challenge. (2011)

Gill (2007) poses four arguments in support of risk in activity:

1. Helping children to learn to manage risk (understanding safety)
 2. Feeding children’s innate need for risk with reasonable risks in order to prevent them finding greater un-managed risks to themselves
 3. Health and developmental benefits
 4. Developmental benefits including the building of character and personality traits such as resilience and self-reliance
- Tim calls these “calls for proportion and balance”.

Risk/Benefit

Risk/benefit is an analysis of the benefits of an activity balanced against an estimation of the risks of that activity.

The Health and Safety executive of the UK provides the following advice for those providing for “school trips and outdoor learning activities:

School trips have clear benefits for pupils, and large numbers of successful visits and outdoor learning activities take place each year.

Misunderstandings about the application of health and safety law may, in some cases, discourage schools and teachers from organising such trips. These misunderstandings stem from a wide range of issues but may include frustrations about paperwork, fears of prosecution if the trip goes wrong, and the belief that a teacher will be sued if a child is injured.

This statement gives clear messages to tackle the myths about bureaucracy and prosecution. However, HSE has no influence on the levels and types of civil claims for compensation that may be made against schools or individual teachers.

HSE fully supports schools arranging a wide range of out-of-school activities, which can include visits to museums, trips to the countryside or taking part in challenging and adventurous activities. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken and unfounded health and safety concerns do not create obstacles that prevent these from happening.

This statement provides managers and staff in local authorities and schools* with a clear picture of HSE’s perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage all schools and local authorities to remove wasteful bureaucracy imposed on those organising trips and activities – so that focus is on how the real risks† are managed and not on the paperwork. Our primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law, and any investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefit of learning away from the school

Key message: 'Well-managed school trips and outdoor activities are great for children. Children won't learn about risk if they're wrapped in cotton wool.'

HSE fully recognises that learning outside the classroom helps to bring the curriculum to life – it provides deeper subject learning and increases self-confidence. It also helps pupils develop their risk awareness and prepares them for their future working lives. Striking the right balance between protecting pupils from risk and allowing them to learn from school trips has been a challenge for many schools, but getting this balance right is essential for realising all these benefits in practice.

Striking the right balance means that:

- schools and staff focus on real risks when planning trips;
- those running trips understand their roles, are supported, and are competent to lead or take part in them;
- the real risks are managed during the trip; and
- learning opportunities are experienced to the full.

Striking the right balance does not mean that:

- every aspect is set out in copious paperwork that acts as a security blanket for those organising the trip;
- detailed risk assessment and recording procedures aimed at higher-risk adventure activities are used when planning lower-risk school trips;
- mistakes and accidents will not happen; and
- all risks must be eliminated.

What staff should expect from their schools

Key message: 'Teachers should expect their schools to have procedures that encourage participation, are proportionate to the level of risk and avoid bureaucracy.'

Schools need to ensure that the precautions proposed are proportionate to the risks involved, and that their paperwork is easy to use. They should also take account of the assessments and procedures of any other organisations involved, and ensure that communications with others are clear. 10 The school's arrangements for trips should ensure that:

- risk assessment focuses attention on real risks – not risks that are trivial and fanciful;
- proportionate systems are in place – so that trips presenting lower-risk activities are quick and easy to organise, and higher-risk activities (such as those involving climbing, caving or water-based activities) are properly planned and assessed;
- those planning the trips are properly supported – so that staff can readily check if they have taken sufficient precautions or whether they should do more.

What the school, pupils and parents should expect from staff

Key message: 'Those running school trips need to focus on the risks and the benefits to people – not the paperwork.'

Staff running school trips should clearly communicate information about the planned activities to colleagues and pupils (and parents, where appropriate). This should explain what the precautions are and why they are necessary, to help ensure that everyone focuses on the important issues.

It is important that those running school trips act responsibly by:

- putting sensible precautions in place, and making sure these work in practice;
- knowing when and how to apply contingency plans where they are necessary;
- heeding advice and warnings from others, for example those with local knowledge or specialist expertise (especially in respect of higher-risk activities).

This document can be found online at: www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/school-trips.pdf.

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Managing Risk in Play Provision

Introduction

Currently our society appears to be obsessed with achieving zero risk in play provision for our children. This has severely restricted the learning opportunities available to children and, according to research around the world, is negatively impacting on growth and development physically, emotionally and intellectually.

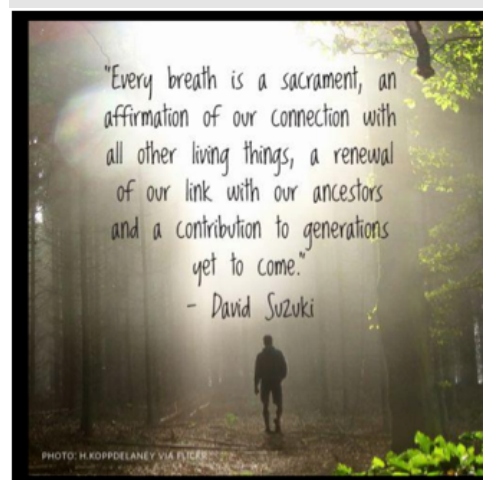
Context

'All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.'" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group 2005 in A world without play: a literature review 2012)

There is a danger in viewing play only as a tool for achieving other outcomes, such as learning or fitness, and of losing sight of the essence of play itself. We are in danger of 'play' becoming transformed into structured activities with clear goals and aims rather than something that is self-directed, enjoyable and instinctive. It is only by following their own rules, in their own time, that children fully reap the benefits of playing.

As adults we need to be aware of the importance of play and take action to promote and protect the conditions that support it. The guiding principle is that any intervention to promote play acknowledges its characteristics and allows sufficient flexibility, unpredictability and security for children to play freely' (Lester and Russell 2010: 46).

Children need to take risks when playing. Play provision within our schools should respond to this need and offer environments that will challenge and support the development of skills. In order to make risk a part of play provision we need to manage risk and balance benefits.



TASMANIAN
CATHOLIC
education commission

Related documents:

[Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning Policy](#)

[Managing Risk in Outdoor Learning Experiences](#)

Play Provision and Risk

Risk-taking is an essential part of children's play. Managing that risk is the key to providing opportunities that support growth and development and keep children safe from unreasonable risk and injury. The balancing of these two is vital for our children's health and development.

The law expects leaders and others to manage significant risks as far as is reasonably practicable – this does not mean eliminating all risks. It follows that, for every experience, an appropriate person should decide if the balance between risk and opportunity is appropriate for the learners concerned.

Risk/benefit analysis consciously balances the benefits of an experience against the intrinsic risks along with risk assessment.



Play, happiness and well-being

The children who thrive enter school with strong communication skills. They are confident and self-assured, adept at making friends, persistent, creative, and excited about learning. These are the qualities that children acquire through play. (Segal 2004, 33)

Physical benefits of play

"Through their interactions with the environment during play, children gain control and ultimately mastery over their bodies with the development of a range of manipulative and motor skills. They learn new skills and concepts, discover the world, and learn about themselves and others through their interactions in a variety of social situations. Play also facilitates language development, creative thinking and problem-solving, and helps children deal with complex and competing emotions" (Dempsey & Frost, 1993; Wyver & Spence, 1999; Zeece & Graul, 1993 cited in Gleaves & Cole-Hamilton 2012).

Several studies have shown that playing is good for developing motor functioning, and most infants and toddlers acquire fundamental movement skills through unstructured physical activity and play. Children who lack proficient motor skills often choose not to participate in physical activities as they get older, and as games become more competitive (Graham and others 2005 cited in Low Deiner and Qiu 2007). Better motor function has also been found to lead to fewer accidents (HC Netherlands 2004).

Cognitive benefits of play

Children's early experiences and interactions, including those during play, affect the way the brain develops and helps shape its structures (Shore, 1997).

According to Piaget, play provides children with extensive opportunities to interact with materials in the environment and construct their own knowledge of the world, making play one of the most important elements of cognitive development (Zigler and Bishop-Josef 2009). As Elkind reflects: 'Play is our need to adapt the world to ourselves and create new learning experiences' (Elkind 2007: 3).

Others claim that playing contributes to children's developing vocabulary, their understanding of different concepts, their ability to solve problems, their self-confidence and motivation, and an awareness of the needs of others (Zigler 2009).

Constructive and imaginative play has been identified as most important for cognitive development (HC Netherlands 2004). Play involving arts, craft and design gives children the opportunity to develop the fine motor skills of hand and finger control, required for handwriting (Lindon 2007).

"... willingness to engage in some risky activities provides opportunities to learn new skills, try new behaviours and ultimately reach our potential" (Little, H. & Wyer, S. 2008)

Social benefits of play

Aggressive behaviour has been linked to a lack of interesting and engaging environments and destructive behaviour is most common in boring spaces without trees, bushes or other natural boundaries. Bland environments such as these, mean that peer groups can feel it is difficult to have their own space or get away from each other (Bird 2007a; Bird 2007b).

Sandseter and others (2011) provide compelling evidence that taking risks in play is a natural coping mechanism, which helps to reduce fears and tackle phobias. In this sense, risk-taking in play mirrors many aspects of cognitive behavioural therapy; by thinking less negatively about anxieties it can help to reduce anxious behaviour. Over-protection can cause children to become more anxious and develop behaviours associated with anxiety throughout their lives.



All children need nature.

Not just the ones whose parents appreciate nature.

Not only those children of a certain economic class or culture or set of abilities.

Richard Louv

Emotional benefits of play

“Risky play is a part of the normal process ...that adapts the child to its current environment through first developing normal adaptive fear to initially protect the child against ecological factors, and thereafter risky play as a fear reducing behavior where the child naturally performs exposure behavior.” (Allen and Rapee, 2005 cited in Sandseter, E. and Kennair, L. 2011)

Sandseter and Kennair suggest that a lack of risky play may be a part of the reason we are seeing a rise in mental health issues in our children. Our fear of our children being injured and our determination to protect them may be coming at a very high cost.

Research shows that playground injuries are most often “species normal” (that is injuries that have normally occurred throughout history) and do not result in permanent harm (Sandseter, E. and Kennair, L. 2011 p. 259). Further to this – most injuries are the result of children’s use of equipment rather than the equipment itself, suggesting that children’s need for excitement will influence how they use play provisions.

Nature deficit

Nature Deficit Disorder describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illness. (Louv, R. 2005)

Play that involves contact with nature appears to have a positive effect on recovery from stress and attention fatigue and on mood, concentration, self-discipline and physiological stress (Health Council of the Netherlands 2004).

The less children play outdoors, the less they learn to cope with the risks and challenges they will go on to face as adults ... Nothing can replace what children gain from the freedom and independence of thought they have when trying new things out in the open. (Byron, T. cited in Hillsdon, M. 2009)

Resilience

The complex nature of play makes it central to children’s developing resilience as they grow up. Lindon defines resilience as ‘an outlook for children and young people characterised by the willingness to confront challenges, with a sense of confidence that it is possible to deal with setbacks. Resilience is built from a foundation of emotional security that key, familiar adults will help’ (Lindon 2007: 7).

“No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”

Sir David Attenborough

Educating for sustainability and play

Adults who engage with nature from a young age are more likely to be motivated to protect the environment. The critical age for engagement appears to be before 12 years.

In order to have scientists who work to discover more about the environment we need children who are exploring, investigating and getting deeply involved with all that nature has to offer.

Widespread evidence suggests that the strongest environmental sensibilities in adulthood stem from childhood experiences of unstructured play in natural environments, including interactive (potentially damaging) activities. (Maudsley, M. 2007)

Managing risk in play provision

According to statistics out of the UK the most dangerous place for a child to be is at home. And yet we continue to assume that 'outside' is a dangerous place for children to be.

In Australia the statistics are similar:

ACTIVITY AND LOCATION WHEN INJURED

Australian children are generally physically active. Among 498,000 children aged 5-14 years who reported being injured recently, the most common activities these children had been undertaking at the time of injury were leisure activities (e.g. playing non-organised sport or games), and organised sports. In 2001, half of all recent injuries for children this age (51%) occurred during leisure activities, and around a third (27%) while children were playing sports. A further 17% occurred while attending school (Clapperton A. et al 2003).

The most common locations at which 5-14 year olds received injuries were outside their own or someone else's home (32%), at school (30%), at a sports facility (20%), or inside their own or someone else's home (16%). (ABS)

In June 2006, there were 4 million children aged under 15 years in Australia, representing one-fifth (19%) of the total population (ABS 2006a). Health gains brought about by better living conditions, education, medical care and vaccination would suggest that this generation of children should be the healthiest ever (Patton et al. 2005). However, there are emerging concerns related to rapid social change and the associated new morbidities such as increasing levels of behavioural, developmental, mental health and social problems (AIHW 2006). Early childhood in particular has become a key priority for Australian government and non-government organisations (AIHW 2006).

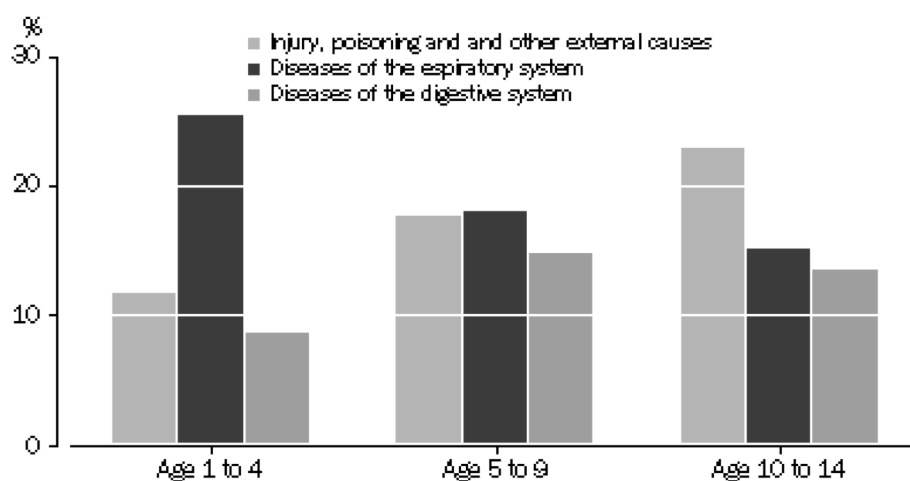
HEALTH CONDITIONS

- In 2004-05, 41% of children aged under 15 years had a long-term health condition compared with 44% in 2001 (ABS 2006 & ABS 2002).
- Boys (44%) were more likely than girls (38%) to have a long term health condition.
- Diseases of the respiratory system were reported for 19% of children - the main conditions were asthma (12%), hayfever and allergic rhinitis (8%) and chronic sinusitis (3%).
- Diseases of the eye and adnexa were reported for 10% of children - the main conditions were long sightedness (4%) and short sightedness (4%).
 - Mental and behavioural problems were reported for 7% of children overall - these main conditions were behavioural & emotional problems with usual onset in childhood or adolescence (3%) and problems of psychological development (3%).

HOSPITALISATION

- Of total hospital separations in 2004-05, 528,100 (8%) involved children aged under 15 years (AIHW 2007).
- Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period (38%) and diseases of the respiratory system (13%) were the main causes of hospitalisation for children under one year of age (AIHW 2007).
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Major reasons for hospital separations for children aged 1-14 years, 2004-05



Source: AIHW, National Hospital Morbidity Database.

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3. Health and developmental benefits
4. Developmental benefits including the building of character and personality traits such as resilience and self-reliance

Tim calls these “calls for proportion and balance”.

Through PLAY children:

- Take risks and make mistakes
- Make choices that involve challenge

- Can be offered opportunities to use a range of tools safely
- Experience a range of activities which will encourage children's interest and curiosity
- Can be assisted to build the confidence to take manageable risks in play
- Develop an understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges
- Learn to assess risks with help from adults

Good practice

In order that play provision provides rich experiences for children it needs to meet the seven objectives outlined below:

Objective 1

- ◆ The provision extends the choice and control that students have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

Objective 2

- ◆ The provision recognises the student's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.

Objective 3

- ◆ The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

Objective 4

- ◆ The provision maximises the range of play opportunities.

Objective 5

- ◆ The provision fosters independence and self-esteem.

Objective 6

- ◆ The provision fosters student's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.

Objective 7

- ◆ The provision fosters the student's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

(NPFPA 2000 Best Play pp. 18-29)

Quality play provision will provide opportunities for children to test their skills, to take risks and to explore nature. A key component of quality play provision is the role of the adult in supporting play and in enabling children by adopting a “culture of tolerance” towards children playing and exploring.

Play provision should enable multiple uses of spaces in order to respond to the needs and interests of a range of children.

Risk/Benefit

Risk/benefit is an analysis of the benefits of an activity balanced against an estimation of the risks of that activity.

The Health and Safety executive of the UK provides the following advice for those providing for “children’s play and leisure”:

- Key message: ‘Play is great for children’s well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool’.
- HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child’s risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.

Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk.

Striking the right balance does mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be

managed

- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

Striking the right balance does not mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

Conclusion

Play and exploration is a fundamental human right for all children, regardless of age, gender, culture, social class or disability. This must be reflected in the range of play environments and outdoor learning opportunities we offer children to ensure that all are able to engage in experiences that help improve their quality of life.

“Although the term ‘risk-taking’ often has negative connotations, the reality is that the willingness to engage in some risky activities provides opportunities to learn new skills, try new behaviours and ultimately reach our potential. Challenge and risk, in particular during outdoor play, allows children to test the limits of their physical, intellectual and social development” (Little, H & Wyver, S, 2009).

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