

Risky Play Policy

Risky play is a natural part of children's play, and children often seek out opportunities for engaging in challenging and so-called risky play. Risky play can be defined as a thrilling and exciting activity that involves a risk of physical injury, and play that provides opportunities for challenge, testing limits, exploring boundaries and learning about injury risk (Sandseter, 2007; Little & Wyver, 2008). Activities such as climbing, sliding, balancing, jumping from heights and hanging upside down can be considered as risky (Tovey, 2010). It is important that both staff and parents are aware of the importance of risky play and that safety policies and regulations do not get in the way of this vital form of play.

Why risky play is important

Involvement in risky play gives children the opportunity to access risks and manage situations. Even very young children are taking risks, which in turn lead to new learning experiences, such as walking, running, climbing and riding a bike. Each of these activities involves some risks but they are necessary for the development of children and risky play is not different. Risky play gives children the opportunity to extend their limits and learn life skills. Success and failure provide children with the motivation to try again and work out different ways of doing things (Tovey, 2010). It is this motivation to master a new challenge, and the excitement felt when it is finally mastered that drives children to engage in risky play. The feelings associated with risky play such as fun, enjoyment, excitement, thrill, pride, and achievement are reasons children often give for engaging in risky play.

Movements that are often associated with risky play, such as, swinging, climbing, rolling, hanging, sliding, are not only fun for children but also essential for their motor skills, balance, coordination, and body awareness. Children who do not engage in such movements are more likely to be clumsy, feel

uncomfortable in their own body, have poor balance, and a fear of movement. The role of a teacher is to create a play environment where children can engage in movements that fulfil their sensory needs.

How our provision supports risky play

For some children risky play activities may not come naturally to them, for example children who are withdrawn or isolated, children with a different first language, children who have speech delays, and children with sensory or physical impairments could need additional support or encouragement when engaging in such activities. Teachers observe and assess the children during free play to judge which of them (if any) need additional support with risky activities. Some ways in which teachers encourage and support all the children are:

- To modify the environment as much as possible to meet the needs of each child.
- Be aware that some children may need longer to feel confident engaging in an activity, such as balancing or climbing.
- Encourage the children to help each other.
- Simplify an activity, e.g. if a child is too anxious to balance on a high branch allow them to gain confidence by beginning on a low branch.
- Maximise use of natural environment to facilitate children in managing own risks (Forest Friday's).
- Discretely teach how to use real tools safely and appropriately for tasks.

Furthermore, the act of using real tools has also been found to support the healthy development of young children's arm and hand muscles, which helps individuals to familiarise themselves with pre-writing tools. Our nursery and reception children have access to real tools and are taught specific skills through discrete teaching in order to use the tools independently, safely and effectively. Hence, the woodwork area is a staple aspect of provision within the reception environment.

Engaging with 'real' work, using real tools, often engages whole body movement. In this sense, the use of real tools intrinsically motivates children and sustains their concentration for longer periods of time.

Accidents can always happen and teachers recognise this and learn to deal with them. Children need to learn from their actions, and how to keep themselves safe. This means that falling over, slipping, or landing awkwardly, is an important part of play that will help them in the future. Having a positive attitude towards accidents is important to the children. This should be done by talking about what

happened and discussing alternatives rather than banning the equipment or activity that resulted in an accident.

Conclusion

Risky play is an invaluable part of childhood. Research shows that not only does it increase children's physical and motor skills but also teaches them about their own limits, and how to deal with risks in the future.

Risky play should be available for all children regardless of age, ability, or gender. Teachers should: support and encourage children who are anxious, use positive language when accidents occur, and modify activities to suit a variety of abilities as this ensures that all children can be involved in risky play to some extent. What one child considers risky might not seem so risky for another child, teachers must be aware of this and allow children to learn what they themselves are capable of. The more children are free to engage in risky play the better they will be at managing risks, judging what they are capable of, and keeping themselves safe. The role of the teacher is to provide a challenging and risky learning environment that will support all children as they become more motivated, curious, able, and adventurous.

Date written 14th November 2021

Date reviewed 1st September 2024

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