



Kidsafe NSW Inc.

Challenging Play - Risky!



Children both need and want to take risks in order to explore their limits, venture into new experiences and for their development. Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but the experience of minor injuries is a universal part of childhood and has a positive role in child development.

An ideal environment for developing and testing skills in safe, creative play environments. Children need opportunities to:

- Develop skills in negotiating the environment (including risks);
- Learn how to use equipment safely and for its designed purpose;
- Develop coordination and orientation skills;
- Take acceptable risks; and
- Learn about the consequences (positive/negative) of risk taking



Risk does not always have a negative outcome. Many positives can come from taking risks. Therefore, it can be helpful to think as risk being divided into two components:

- **A CHALLENGE:** something obvious to the child where he/she can determine their ability and decide whether to take that risk
- **A HAZARD:** something unseen or not obvious to the child that often results in injury!

Both are RISKS!

Some hazards may have value in that they can be an opportunity for learning.

Try to avoid treating each potential hazard with the same degree of seriousness. Consider:

- which hazards need to be modified or removed?
- which hazards might be acceptable or desirable because they create opportunities for children to gain access to potential benefits?
- what hazards need to be created to enhance children's opportunities to gain potential benefits?
- what is to be done about identified hazards, if anything?
- can this hazard actually be reframed and managed as a challenge?

Managing risk and challenge

Effective risk assessment and management requires:



- Distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable risks including:
 - The likelihood of coming to harm;
 - The severity of that harm; and
 - The benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity.

- Observing the children and identifying those who need greater challenge or specific support
- Establishing and displaying expectations for behaviour
- Actively encourage children to assess risks and possible consequences
- Establish a systematic maintenance program

Benefits of Risk Taking

When considering the benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity you may include the following:

- Pleasure
- Development of self-confidence and well-being
- Engagement with the natural environment and natural elements
- Learning through experience
- Mixing between different age ranges

By weighing up the positives as well as the negatives of a risk in a playground, providers are more likely to be able to provide for managed risk which is engaging, developmentally appropriate and beneficial for children of all ages.