



47a Risky Play

Abbeydale Cottage Nursery acknowledge children's right to have a voice, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, [UN 1989] and we recognise that children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities. It is therefore paramount that we create a safe and secure place where our children can learn to play and explore to make sense of their world, and gain vital independence skills, before they attend school.

We listen to children through observing their likes, dislikes, interests, and preferences responding to them by creating access to play opportunities which satisfy their likes and interests and extend their play. We understand the importance of the whole spectrum of play and strive to support all forms of play that children seek. We recognise the innate desire children have to engage in positive risk play and the benefits this has for them which is well documented in child development literature.

Our children's safety is paramount, and they will not be allowed to take unnecessary risks with their own or others safety and well-being. Procedures are always in place to safeguard children and they will be guided in how to use equipment safely and how to behave well within the setting. For example, children are not permitted to run around whilst handling scissors or sharp tools, although they may use them with care at the designated place set aside for them in an appropriate way.

What is risky play in early years?

The Health and Safety Executive states "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 up in cotton wool" Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach, HSE

Risky play allows children to challenge themselves on many levels:

- Physically – by climbing a little higher, running a little faster or jumping a little further
- Emotionally – feeling out of control or overcoming fear
- Mentally – learning how to get out of trouble, learning your own boundaries and that of the environment around them

Risky Play presents children with opportunities to:

- Push themselves to the limits of their capabilities and allows them space to progress
- Feel in control of their actions, learning and play as they experiment and set own challenges
- Learn boundaries in a safe, secure, and supportive environment
- Develop problem solving skills
- Improve their physicality, health, and well-being



47a Risky Play

- Build confidence, independence, and resilience

Risky play can be broken down into six main areas:

- Rapid speed
- Dangerous tools
- Dangerous elements
- Rough and tumble
- Great heights
- Disappearing or getting lost

Ref: Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter

Activities will be age and stage appropriate. Staff are knowledgeable about what it is that children enjoy and observe and plan for play and experiences which will help them to learn and achieve next steps in their development. Children will always be under the supervision of staff.

Types of risky play

Children may be involved in:

- using climbing apparatus or climbing trees
- building with wooden blocks
- balancing beams
- swings and slides
- using natural materials such as wood and tree stumps
- rolling or sliding down steep banks
- playing chasing games
- exploring the woods or outdoor environment
- soft play rough and tumble
- scissors or safety knives or peelers

The role of the adult

Staff will support and encourage all children to enable them to gain in confidence and try new things, be available to explore with them and talk about things that interest them, listening and responding to their questions. They will balance a child's



47a Risky Play

innate desire to explore and test boundaries, risk taking and managing their own play against likely risk of harm.

Practitioners will also need to:

- Risk assess the areas used daily and make appropriate provision e.g. adequate supervision, correct positioning of the equipment (away from windows, or walls), crash mats, no overcrowding, turn taking
- Ensure health and safety procedures and policies are being followed
- Make sure all children are safe and protected in all weathers
- Ensure equipment is safe and age and stage appropriate e.g. consider small parts as potential choking hazards, moving parts, broken or damaged toys or equipment
- Join in when invited into children play
- Be enthusiastic about being outside
- Plan fun and exciting play experiences which take account of knowledge and experience
- Be aware of the environment and alert to possible dangers e.g. poisonous plants, traffic and moving vehicles, members of the public, animals, hazards which are a risk to health e.g. animal faeces, steep slopes, steps, heights, weather
- Make sure all children are included and can take part e.g. consider allergies and intolerance's when baking, use child safety knives or scissors
- Develop activities to the needs of the child and their next steps
- Support children to take risks and explore
- Encourage children to try new activities and to judge risks for themselves
- Respect children's efforts and ideas
- Reflect on what works and what does not work and why
- Follow all reasonable instructions from line managers and consider other practitioners views on the overall safety of an activity

Share information with parents about the benefits of rough-and-tumble play

- Creates a positive parent-child emotional bond - teaches social-emotional and cognitive skills, problem solving, self-control, appropriate risk taking, self-esteem, cooperation, and competition
- Encourage parents to engage in rough-and-tumble play with their children - be positive, nurturing, and warm when playing, element challenge, but be aware of cues of frustration, recognise and praise the child when able to calm down



47a Risky Play

Positive Risk Assessment

We will adapt environments and source resources and equipment which provide appropriate levels of challenge. Opportunities offered will be carefully measured to ascertain whether the managed risk outweighs the potential risks involved within the activity/experience in line with Health and Safety legislation and nursery policy. Where it is necessary for staff to conduct dynamic risk assessments, the individual practitioner must consider the overall benefit against the risk of injury or harm occurring to the child/ren or other members of staff.

Our risk assessments will balance risks against benefits and supported by procedures and guidance where needed, to enable the risk assessments to have the flexibility to make allowances for the “individual child” and the different needs and abilities our children have.

We will analyse accidents weekly to ascertain whether there are any areas where a new risk assessment should be carried out or another action taken.

What you can do

Ensure rough-and-tumble play remains safe:

- Play space is free of hazards and not over-crowded e.g. remove hard items, use padding/crash mats, control number of children in area
- Help children develop rules to guide play e.g. turn-taking, area clear before jump, slide or roll, no kicking or choking
- Provide adequate supervision
- Adults model required behaviours
- Create classroom environment of cooperation and belonging e.g. see things from another’s point of view, work together, negotiate, problem solve, share, accept and help one another during structured and unstructured times to support boundaries and safe play
- Play within safe boundaries e.g. child-led, consensual, below adult waist height for “falls” or “flipping” of children in soft play, use crash mats, soft blocks only thrown at body, rolling, tickling, jumping, running in appropriate locations e.g. no running in classroom



47a Risky Play

What you cannot do

- Impose your definition of risk on the child
- Use excessive or unreasonable force for age and stage of development
- Lift and throw and/or flip children over your shoulder or above head height
- Throw or kick resources at force and/or across a space
- Use tools or equipment that are potentially dangerous without relevant training, qualifications or authorisation from management e.g. lighting a fire outside during “Forest school” sessions, using saw or loppers

Policy adopted	Review	Reviewed by
October 2020	Annually	