

RISKY PLAY

Having opportunities to take part in risky play is an important part of childhood. Children need to be kept safe from potential harm and hazards at all times, but they also need to have opportunities to explore and take risks.

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 by overcoming fear
- **Mentally** – learning how to get out of trouble, learning their own boundaries and that of the environment around them

Children need opportunities to problem solve and experiment with taking risks to challenge themselves physically and mentally. They need time to practice new skills and develop their bodies.

Children need and instinctively want to be able to take risks to test their abilities and strengths. However, children do need support to take these risks as part of their learning and development.

When creating a safe environment for children, staff must consider their legal duty to identify and reduce or eliminate risk, but should also take into account those risks which are acceptable too. The risk benefits will include children being able to expand their skills, as they climb higher, reach further, or balance for longer, but also experience the consequence of taking risks beyond their current ability.

Allowing children to take risks can help children to develop an “I can do it” attitude which will in turn encourage children to try things out and see a challenge as something to be relished rather than avoided. A willingness to try things out and to take risks are important factors in becoming effective learners. It does not help a child to develop resilience if they are only given tasks that they can easily achieve.

Indoor/Outdoor Play

Both environments should be safe and secure places where children can learn through play and gain independence skills. It is vital that these are prepared environments, rich in opportunities for children to learn and explore and to make sense of the world around them.

Staff are knowledgeable about what it is that children enjoy and observe and plan learning experiences which will help them to achieve their next steps in their development. Children need supervision from staff at all times, but it is important that staff know when to step in and when to sit back and let the child resolve issues by themselves.

The children's safety is always paramount and they are not allowed to take unnecessary risks with their own or others safety and well-being. Procedures are in place to safeguard children at all times and children should be guided in how to use equipment safely and how to behave well within the setting. For example our outdoor woodworking area where the children learn about the safe use of tools and risk assessment.

Our children also help to prepare snack on a daily basis and regularly take part in cooking and baking activities. In doing so the children are using real utensils such as knives to cut fruit and vegetables. These activities are supervised by an adult and consideration is always given to the use of cooking ingredients in case of allergies and intolerance's.

Outdoor play is fundamental for all children's health and well-being. The nursery garden is accessible all day, every day and our children are actively encouraged to spend time outdoors irrespective of the weather conditions. It is therefore imperative that your child has the appropriate outdoor clothing for that day. In addition to the nursery garden we organise outdoor sessions in the local woods and have regular trips to the park. Often outdoor play is messy which most children enjoy and it provides a rich environment for children to take risks and play energetically.

The role of the adult

Adults need to support and encourage all children to enable them to gain in confidence and try out new things, they need to be available to explore with them and talk about things that interest our children outdoors and listen

and respond to their questions. Children need to be supervised at all times indoors and outdoors, yet allowed freedom to take risks and manage their own play.

Planning for the curriculum and next steps in development will help staff to know what it is that children need to learn next, but also extend their play ideas and to have fun exploring and experimenting. Staff need to observe how play is being managed and change areas if necessary to meet the needs and interests of the children. It is important that children have plenty of time outdoors every day and essential that the adults share in the child's curiosities and delights – the adult needs to be tuned in to the children and their interests and teach children how to care for their environment.

Adults also need to:

- Risk assess the areas used daily
- 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
- Join in when invited into children play
- Be enthusiastic about being outside
- Plan fun and exciting learning experiences
- Make sure all children are included and can take part
- Develop activities to the needs of the child and their next steps
- Reflect on what works and what does not work and why

By being actively involved in the children's outdoor experiences, adults have a chance to ensure the children in their care have happy, worthwhile and meaningful experiences, which will enhance their developing skills whilst having fun together. Supervision of children is key for ensuring safety, but this needs to be balanced opportunities to explore and discover independently. A safe environment is one where safety is not seen as safety **from** all possible harm, but one that offers safety **to** explore, experiment, try things out and to take risks.