

LET THEM CLIMB TREES AND FALL

A JOURNEY OF RISK TAKING

Robyn Daff & Gail Ladds City of Kingston



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The trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more

Erica Jong

(American Author of "Fear of Flying")



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History.....

- Occupational Health & Safety
- Surplus safety management
- Loss of reputation
- Fear of litigation
- Fearful educators
- Expensive play equipment



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What changed?

- Rethinking of practice
- Change of management
- Team wanting to change
- Team willing to take risks
- A new culture – collaboration and conversation
- Team members studying – critical reflection
- Visited other services – came back inspired
- Research – what are the theorists telling us?



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What is risky play?

“Risky play is defined as thrilling and challenging forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury...it takes place outdoors and in children’s free play” (Sandseter, 2007)

A risk is something that is possible to negotiate and may be appropriate for particular situations and children.

A hazard is something that is inherently dangerous and needs to be remedied, such as a climbing structure with sharp edges or loose boards that could seriously injure children if they play on it. (Curtis, 2010)



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Categorising risk - Sandseter

Categories	Risk	Subcategories
Great heights	Danger of injury from falling	Climbing Jumping from still or flexible surfaces Balancing on high objects Hanging/swinging at great heights
High Speed	Uncontrolled speed and pace that can lead to collision with something (or someone)	Swinging at high speed Sliding at high speed Running uncontrollably at high speed Bicycling at high speed
Dangerous Tools	Can lead to injuries and wounds	Cutting tools: knives; saws; axes Strangling tools; ropes
Dangerous Elements	Where children can fall into or from something	Cliffs, Deep or icy water, fire pits
Rough- and -tumble	Where children can harm each other	Wrestling; fencing with sticks; play fighting
Disappear/get lost	Where children can disappear from supervision of adults, get lost alone	Go exploring alone; playing alone in unfamiliar environments



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Categorising risk - Sandseter

Why do we believe risk taking is important?

We started with one critical belief:

Children's safety is paramount. Nothing we did was to compromise this. Whatever we provided – experiences or environments - our focus was to prevent disabling injuries without “depriving children of the opportunity for natural risk management” (Sandseter, 2012. p2).



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Why is risk important?

1. Helping children to learn how to manage risk – understanding safety
2. Feeding children's innate need for risk with reasonable risk in order to prevent them finding greater unmanaged risk for themselves
3. Health and development benefits
4. The building of character and personality traits such as resilience and self-reliance



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Why is risk important?

Current research tells us that children need to take risk to learn how to manage risks – an essential part of growing up (The Guardian, 2008)

At real play, children are in charge, instinctively making hundreds of decisions as they assess and determine the levels of risk they want to take, physically, emotionally and socially: mastering, day by day, an increasing repertoire of skills, adding to their bank of experience.

Adrian Voce is director of Play England

avoce@ncb.org.uk



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Risk and vulnerability

This is our research challenge:

We know that vulnerable children are at risk of poor physical health or mental health – such as poor academic performance, relationship problems, crime in adolescence and adulthood. (Raising Children Network, 2006).

We believe



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We use risky play to help children:

- Learn to know their emotions
- Manage their emotions
- Motivate themselves
- Recognise emotions in others
- Skill them in handling relationships
- Increase wellbeing
- Enable them to express their views, thoughts and feelings
- Strengthen their social skills
- Build understanding and skills.



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The risk benefit approach

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.



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Strategies.....

- Observing the children and identifying those who need greater challenge or specific support – what we know about children’s capabilities
- Establishing and displaying expectations for behaviour
- Actively encourage children to assess risks and possible consequences – we trust children to make their own decisions about a particular risk
- Establish a systematic maintenance program
- *Educators relinquish control.....not always easy!*



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Moving from Playing It Safe to Being Collaboratively Courageous

At Kingston we:

Acknowledge children as capable and desirous of testing their developing skills and understandings of and in the world,

Invite parents into collaborative relations that inform decision making about what and how children can learn, and

Encourage educators to trust themselves and their children to learn together while exploring meaning making in the real world they inhabit. (New, 2005)



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Learning is their journey
Let them navigate
Push them to explore
Watch them discover
Encourage their questions
Allow them to struggle
Support their thinking
Let them fly...



Tim Clarke
https://twitter.com/tim_jumpclarke/status/447616235266920448

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