

Risky Play and its Benefits Policy

Aim

At ICP Nurseries Ltd, we recognise that play is crucial to a child's learning and development. It is in play that we test our beliefs of how the world is made up and how we fit and function within it. As part of this testing process, we need to take an element of risk in order to discover the limitations of ourselves and of the world around us. Without this, how would children develop to solve problems? At ICP Nurseries Ltd we offer challenges and risks to challenge the children but not at the risk of their safety.

Risky Play is Important

Children begin to take risks right from birth. Babies take their first independent breaths; they decide to try crawling and walking and then running; they try new foods; and they see a tree and want to climb it. It is the staff member or adult who is risk averse, which makes physically active, playful risk taking ever more difficult for children to practise. Play is the key way in which young children learn the skills and abilities they need for life. They should be allowed to push the boundaries of their physical and mental skills.

The goal of the Key Person is to not eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are never presented with them. Serious injuries are of course to be avoided, but bumps bruises, cuts and grazes are unavoidable in some situations and are a developmental accident. They are part of childhood, teaching children (through repetition) how to manage their bodies in many different physical situations and how to react when they encounter genuine danger. Without risk we would not be presenting teaching and learning to children for later life.

Points to Consider

- When outside with children, aim to enable them to take risks, not prevent them
- Risk taking is good for children: taking risks is exhilarating, and children want and need to take risks
- The role of the Key Person is to make sure we enable this, without placing the child in actual danger
- It is essential to evaluate the hazards honestly, not just focus in on the worst-case scenario, but also consider the likelihood of serious injury and what children will gain by participating in the activity. This is called the 'risk benefit' approach to play.

Key Person's Role within 'Risk Benefits in Play'

- Discuss with the children the possible hazards, we should encourage them to identify them.
- Some children are nervous about risk in play, the Key Person should hold their hand to offer reassurance to the child or get a buddy to work/play with them.
- The Key Person should stand back and discuss what is happening with another group of children to identify to them how a confident child overcomes the risk within their play.
- Focus on the positive aspects of risky outdoor play – the physical skills children can practise, the excitement, the connection with natural materials and the 'real world' around them, developing strength, co-ordination, agility and body confidence.
- The Key Person will evaluate the hazards honestly: is this activity genuinely risky? How likely is it that a child will get hurt? How serious could the injury be? If potential injuries are minor (cuts and grazes), or unlikely, then the benefits will probably outweigh the risks.
- Build confidence by using positive language. If your language is fearful (don't go there/do that; come down, it's too high; that's dangerous) children will be develop anxiety, not confidence. Say instead, "show me how careful you can be" or "where do you think your foot can go next?" and ask them to talk you through their decision-making. Stand close by without comment allowing children to take an activity as far as they are comfortable, only intervening if you feel a child is going too far.
- Make time for physical play. Accidents often happen simply because we are in a rush and lose concentration. Give children plenty of time to play, whether it's in the playground, garden or on a walk. Being generous with your time is one of the most important things you can do to help children become more active and more body confident.
- Apply common sense; risky outdoor play has always been an integral part of childhood, and the biggest risks to children are in their own homes and travelling in vehicles, not in the outdoor spaces of the nursery or in the playgrounds and pavements we use.