RISK and ADVENTURE
in the Outdoor Play Environment!

WHAT IS PLAY?
• Play is an innate need of ALL children that is vital for healthy development.
• Play is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated.

The Play Cycle
Drive – All kids have it!
Cue – Can be from ones-self, another, or the environment.
Return – Feedback from the cue
Frame – The space of the play activity, physical and/or psychological
Flow – The state of being deep in play
Annihilation – The natural conclusion of play
Dysplay – Repeated misreading of play cues or returns.

RISK
“Risk” when used in reference to “risky play”, means a situation in which a child can recognize and evaluate challenge and decide on a course of action, although there is the potential for injury. In this context, risk can be necessary to support healthy child development. WA Outdoor Preschool Pilot Standards

WHY DO KIDS ENGAGE IN RISKY PLAY?
• To challenge themselves!
• To feel excitement!
• To discover what they are capable of!
• To be “in control of losing control” PlayRights, 2/8, Wendy Russell & Stuart Lester
• In play, children seek: disequilibrium, disorientation, the unexpected, unbalance, uncertainty
• They are masters at: restoring balance through rules, rites & rituals in order to maintain excitement while keeping it safe. Spinka et al, 2001

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RISKY PLAY?
• Brain development
• Learning
• Problem solving

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Creativity  
Language  
Social Development  
Emotional-Behavioral  
Physical-Motor

THE ROLE OF THE PLAYWORKER ON THE SCHOOLYARD:
- To support and advocate for the PLAY process!
- To provide an environment with lots of play opportunity!
- To eliminate hazards and help manage risks!
- To help model conflict resolution.

REASONS TO SUPPORT RISKY PLAY!
- Encounters with risk help children learn how to manage risks in the future.
- Children have an appetite for risk which, if not fed somehow, will lead them to seek out situations in which they may be exposed to greater risks.
- Children gain other benefits as a side-effect of being given the chance to undertake activities with a degree of risk. (see list above!)
- Children build their character and personality through facing up to adverse circumstances where they know there is a possibility of injury or loss
- Mock-aggression helps children understand the norms & conventions of everyday morality.
- The importance of Rough & Tumble play in animals and humans, has been shown to be necessary for the development and maintenance of social awareness, cooperation, fairness and altruism. (Stuart Brown, M.D.)

RISK COMPENSATION:
When a person responds to a safety measure by taking greater risks.

How can we create an Environment that is safe for Risky Play?
- Eliminate the HAZARDS
- Manage the RISKS!

RISK vs. HAZARD
"Hazard", means a source of harm that is not obvious to the child, such that the potential for injury is hidden; or a source of harm that is greater than a child can manage to avoid.

MOST COMMON PLAYGROUND HAZARDS:
1. Falls from great heights
2. Falls onto hard surfaces or things

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3. Head entrapment, especially if up high
4. Head entanglement, especially if up high
5. Sharp protruding things in the area of active play
6. Moving parts that can pinch
7. Trip hazards

EVALUATING RISKS AND HAZARDS IN THE ENVIRONMENT
- What are the risks and hazards?
- How severe is the threat?
- How likely is it to occur?
- What are the benefits of that activity?
- How can I redirect the play to a level of risk I am comfortable with?

HOW TO INTERVENE IN PLAY
- First, Move Closer and Observe!
- Ask questions:
  - What are you up to?
  - Do you see that...?
  - Why do you think that makes me nervous?
  - How could you do it so that...?
- Redirect the activity.
- Communicate Clear and Consistent Consequences

MODELING CONFLICT RESOLUTION
- Acknowledge everyone's feelings.
- Gather information, allowing everyone an opportunity to speak.
- Make a SEPARATION from what happened
- Ask for solutions from kids. Offer possible solutions if necessary.
- Is everyone OK with that? Follow-up afterwards.

TRUST CHILDREN TO SUCCEED!
TRUST THEM TO FAIL, AND LEARN FROM IT!
FIND WAYS TO SAY YES TO PLAY!

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# RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX

## Severity Possible injury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Possible injury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>Scrape, scratch, bruise, minor cut, minor burn. Child able to continue play after minor first aid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Deep cut, burn, minor fracture, sprain, pulled muscle. No permanent damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>Long bone or skull fracture, permanent injury, death.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Calculate the LEVEL of RISK:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity Level</th>
<th>How likely is it to occur?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NOT LIKELY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>Very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## What ACTION to take?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Level</th>
<th>Action Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>No action required. It’s all good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Keep observing. Make kids aware of the risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Try to reduce the risk while balancing the benefits of the activity. Consider redirecting or reframing the activity. Involve kids in the decision making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Appropriate intervention to stop the activity until risk is reduced. Consider what the activity is providing for kids, and whether there is a safer way to achieve that activity. Discuss this with kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Immediate intervention to stop activity!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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