

How do I manage risky play and keep children safe?





What you need to know

Risk should always be taken seriously. But it's also important to remember that young children need to be able to discover the world and use their natural instinct to explore.

So, how do you balance managing risk and putting the safety and welfare of children first, while also helping their development?

Defining risky play

Risky play is defined as giving children opportunities to encounter potential hazards in play, without putting them in danger of serious harm. There is a difference between putting a child at risk and allowing them to take risks.

What's considered risky play?

This list will vary for every nursery, and some may not apply at all. But here we've highlighted the most common areas for risky play in nurseries.

- Playing at height e.g. climbing frames and apparatus
- Playing at speed e.g. swinging, running, cycling
- Plants and gardens e.g. sharp garden equipment, poisonous plants, allergens
- Water e.g. ponds, pools and splash areas
- Equipment with risk e.g. ropes, swings, sticks, nails, gates
- Cooking e.g. hot materials, cooking utensils, choking hazards
- Together play e.g. close interaction such as play fighting

Don't forget about the most common types of injuries – those caused by slips, trips and falls and entrapment of fingers. These can happen whether play is considered risky or not.



Key areas for consideration

Surroundings and maintenance

Regular inspections and maintenance are key. Keep surroundings and equipment in good working order to reduce the likelihood of injury. It's a good idea to record these inspections so that your team know what they should be checking for, and you can evidence that such a check has been undertaken.

How can you help children to interact with their surroundings in a way that also prepares them for life outside of nursery? For example, if children are climbing and jumping, it's a good idea to teach them how to jump and land properly.

This helps them to learn their own boundaries in an environment where they're supported, so they can learn how to keep themselves safe.

Children's impact

Teach the children about risky play. Involve them in the checks that you're carrying out so they're aware of things to look out for.

But don't just talk about risks they need to avoid. Talk to the children about how the risks they encounter make them feel. Does their heart race? Or do they get butterflies in their tummy? What does risk mean for them? Each child will have a different tolerance and need for risk taking.

Emergency procedures

Risk assessments are essential. But if an accident does happen, are all staff briefed on what to do? Make sure you have plans for each area of play and remember to make sure you have your PFA trained staff on hand at all times.

Competency of staff

Are your staff aware of the risks of each area of play they'll supervise? Do they know what to look out for from the start and are they prepared to deal with potential accidents?

Are your staff fully trained in Paediatric First Aid (PFA)? And do you make sure that there are PFA trained staff on all of your outings?

Millie's Mark

Millie's Mark is NDNA's accreditation for excellence in PFA. It's awarded as a special endorsement to childcare providers in England and Scotland that go above and beyond minimum requirements by having 100% of their staff trained in Paediatric First Aid.

The aim of Millie's Mark to raise standards among childcare providers and gives extra reassurance to parents that their children are in safe, well-trained hands.

Getting Risk Assessments right

When you're risk assessing risky play activities it's important to strike a balance between keeping children away from harm, but not becoming so risk averse that you restrict children's experiences and essential development.

Some questions to ask yourself include:

- What might cause harm?
- Who might be harmed?
- How might they be harmed?
- Evaluate those risks and decide how they can be mitigated
- Make sure you write and record your findings



Apply common sense -

While a Risk Assessment is written evidence that you've analysed and prepared for any accidents, it should never over-rule common sense. Use instinct to consider the real time challenges that may now have been part of the original Risk Assessment.

Consider the play activity -

do you feel comfortable allowing it to go ahead considering variables such as weather conditions, the staff in charge and the comfort levels of the children? How can you mitigate these? For example, can you teach the children to take extra care climbing when there's been wet weather, as opposed to telling them not to play at all?

Reflect on your own comfort level -

do you restrict children's play because you don't feel comfortable, when in fact the children themselves are more than comfortable?

Communicate with parents -

of course no parent wants their child to be harmed. But it's important to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of risky play in a supportive and risk assessed environment.

A word from NDNA

NDNA's early years advisers say: Allowing children to take positive risks, whether that's physical or emotional, is always a good way to aid their development. It can boost their confidence and help their understanding of the world. If we're too risk-averse, then they lose the chance to learn how to problem solve and spot risks for themselves. It's always best to take a balanced approach. Armed with good risk assessments and well-trained staff, you can allow the children in your care to take full advantage of risky play.

How Citation can help...

Getting the balance between healthy risky play and prioritising Health & Safety can be tough. But that's where Citation's support can really help. We've got 25 years' experience in helping businesses, and we provide specialist nursery and education care to hundreds of clients across the UK.

From risk assessment to site visits and policies to emergency visits - we've got you covered. Our online platform - Atlas - makes managing your Health & Safety simple and intuitive, and we're just at the end of the phone, 24/7, 365 days a year.

It's our job to support you, so you can get on with what you do best - running your nursery! Just give us a call on **0345 844 1111** and one of our team can chat through your needs and get the ball rolling.