

The importance of managed risk in play

Children develop a whole raft of skills through play, one of these is risk assessment. One only has to look at the massive Health and Safety burden on all aspects of our lives to see that as a society we seem to have lost the ability to make our own decisions about risk.

Learning about risk is a skill that develops with the child – a 2 year old learns whether he or she can jump from the bottom step or the next one up, an older child learns how fast he or she can ride a bike without falling off.

Fortunately, neither of these things is likely to result in tragic accidents if the child gets them wrong, but deny the children the opportunity to learn about risk at these relatively harmless levels and you're leaving it until a child gets behind the wheel of a car, or is offered drugs before their risk assessment skills are tested.

As with most skills, the more this skill is practiced, the more adept the child becomes at assessing risk. Outdoor play is a great arena for children to challenge themselves and learn how to judge risk.

Also, an element of risk in play adds excitement and engages children with the play activity as their confidence develops immensely when they master a new skill that at first seemed difficult and inaccessible.

Fear is a powerful emotion and those responsible for children can get caught up in the what ifs..... By recognising the dangers of not letting children develop their risk assessment skills, the fear about immediate danger can be counterbalanced by a concern for the future and adults can feel more confident about giving children access to appropriate amounts of risk.

Adventure Play Equipment



*Setter Play's **Monkey Rungs'** or the **Firemans Pole** on a climbing unit are examples of risks that the children assess whilst at play; "will I be able to reach the Firemans pole if I step off the platform? Or "can I make it across the Monkey rungs; and if I can't will I fall?"*

