



MODULE #3



A Journey into Risky Play

This module invites you to reflect on:

- What risky play means and why it matters
- The difference between a risk and a hazard
- How to build the confidence and skills needed to embrace and support risky play experiences in your program

***Module Length: Approx. 2 hrs to complete**

Reflection

Take some time to reflect on the following quote. We encourage you to write down your responses and come back to it from time to time as you complete the modules!



"Facilitating children's efforts to take reasonable risks, test their limits, and gain increasing competence and a sense of mastery through active play and social interactions supports and fosters children's health and well-being"

(*How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014; p. 33*)

What does this quote make you think about?





“I believe the biggest risk our children face today is never being exposed to risk”

Evergreen Outdoor Education

WHAT IS YOUR COMFORT LEVEL WITH RISKY/ADVENTEROUS TYPES OF PLAY?



Very
Comfortable!



Comfortable!



Somewhat
Comfortable!



Not
Comfortable!

DO YOUR CHILDHOOD MEMORIES INCLUDE RISKY PLAY EXPERIENCES?
(EX. CLIMBING TREES, RIDING YOUR BIKE REALLY FAST)

WHAT VALUES AND BELIEFS DO YOU HOLD REGARDING RISKY PLAY?

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO FEEL SAFE WHILE TRYING SOMETHING NEW OR CHALLENGING?

Understanding and Defining Risky Play

In the space provided, write your own definition of risky play.

- What comes to mind when you hear the term?

Think about the environments you support.

Using the space provided, describe one example of a risky play experience that you have seen or may encounter in your program.

What is Risky Play?

Risky play—that is, play that incorporates safe risks relative to a child’s age, size, motor skills, and comfort level—is important to a child’s development.

<https://bridgewaycentre.ca/play-idea/benefits-of-risky-play/>



Risk vs Hazard

When supporting risky play it is important to make a distinction between a Risk and Hazard. Supporting risky play does not mean eliminating all opportunities for challenge. It means removing hazards while thoughtfully supporting risks that help children develop confidence, resilience, problem-solving skills, and sound judgment.

Risk

An activity or element (See Ellen Sandseters' 6 Elements of Risky Play on the next page) that could be a little dangerous. It is something that a child sees and they want to challenge themselves and that the child can choose for themselves if they want to take the risk.



List possible Risks you might see in the space below. Do they differ from the risks you identified earlier?:

Hazard

A hazard is something dangerous that could harm a child, which they or you may not notice and therefore cannot make an informed choice about.

We can mitigate these risks by locating and removing hazards, allowing children to engage safely. Examples include conducting daily playground checks and regular safety inspections.



List possible Hazards you might see in the space provided:

6 Elements of Risky Play

By: Ellen Sandseter

Reference: <https://playrevolutionhq.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Ellen-Sandseters-6-Categories-Of-Risky-Play.pdf>



1. Great Heights

Interacting with great heights helps children face fears and build confidence.

Examples Include: Climbing, balancing, or being in elevated places.



2. Rapid Speed

Moving at rapid speeds helps children understand and use their bodies.

Examples Include: Activities like running, biking, or sliding fast.



3. Dangerous Tools

Using dangerous tools helps children build confidence and skills.

Examples Include: Using age-appropriate tools under supervision such as hammers/mallets, screwdrivers or a butter knife.



4. Dangerous elements

Engaging with dangerous elements is a chance to face fears and understand the world.

Examples Include: Water, fire, or natural features (with safety measures).



5. Rough and Tumble

Rough and tumble play is a chance to hone physical and social skills.

Examples Include: Physical play like wrestling or chasing.



6. Disappearing or Getting Lost

Disappearing or getting lost offers a temporary scary thrill.

Examples Include: Hide-and-seek or exploring spaces.

Risk or Hazard Challenge

Read each scenario below and decide whether it describes a Risk or a Hazard. Select your answer and then refer to the **Example Key** section at the end of the module for further explanations.

Reminder.

- **Risk:** A challenge that a child can identify, assess, and manage. Risks offer opportunities for learning, confidence-building, and skill development.
 - **Hazard:** A danger that a child cannot reasonably anticipate or manage and which may result in serious harm.
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#1: *A child climbs a large log that is about knee-high and may lose their balance if they are not careful.*

- ☐ Risk
- ☐ Hazard

#2: *A wooden climbing structure has a hidden loose bolt that could cause part of the structure to collapse.*

- ☐ Risk
- ☐ Hazard

#3: *Children are balancing across stepping stones that vary in height and distance apart.*

- ☐ Risk
- ☐ Hazard

#4: *A playground surface contains broken glass hidden beneath leaves.*

- ☐ Risk
- ☐ Hazard

Video Reflection

Ready to dig a little deeper? Watch the video below to learn more about the difference between a risk and a hazard, inspired by Rusty Keeler's perspective..



Video Title: Outdoor Learning with Rusty Keeler



Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqzUSPyt_N8

(Please Note: Start the video at the **14:39** mark and end at **16:40**)

What reflections do you have after watching this video?

Supporting Risky Play:

Practical Strategies for Educators

Risk-Benefit Management Tool:

- This is a structured process for examining various risky play experiences and reflecting on how they connect with your core values for play.
 - This helps you consider the risks and benefits and how you can manage them.
 - It encourages you to reflect on the potential risks that could happen, but also the positive experiences that could occur.
 - This can help everyone become more comfortable with saying **YES** to risks (families, management, other colleagues).
 - More information and examples of this approach can be found on the following pages.
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Wait, Watch & Wonder:

- Stepping in too early can interrupt children's thinking, and once that interruption occurs, their thinking may not return to its original depth.
- How can you incorporate a thoughtful pause into your practice to give children time to navigate their way through play?
- Think about the power a pause can hold!
Wait – Breath and count to 5.
Watch – Notice what they are doing.
Wonder – Be curious: What are they doing?



Video Reflection

Dig deeper into the Risk, Benefit Management Tool inspired by Rusty Keeler's perspective.



Video Title: Outdoor Learning with Rusty Keeler



Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqzUSPyt_N8

(Please Note: Start the video at the **28:09** mark and end at **39:37**)

What reflections do you have after watching this video?

Try It Out!

Try using the Risk, Benefit, Management Tool to reflect on the scenario below!

Description of the Play Opportunity:

A large fallen tree log is located in the outdoor play area. Children are using it for balancing, hiding objects, imaginative play, and climbing.

Risk	Benefit
<i>What are the Risk's?</i>	<i>What are the Benifit's?</i>
Management	
<i>How will you manage the risk effectivley?</i>	

Additional Thoughts/Considerations:

Refer to the **Example Key** section after completing this activity for further suggestions.

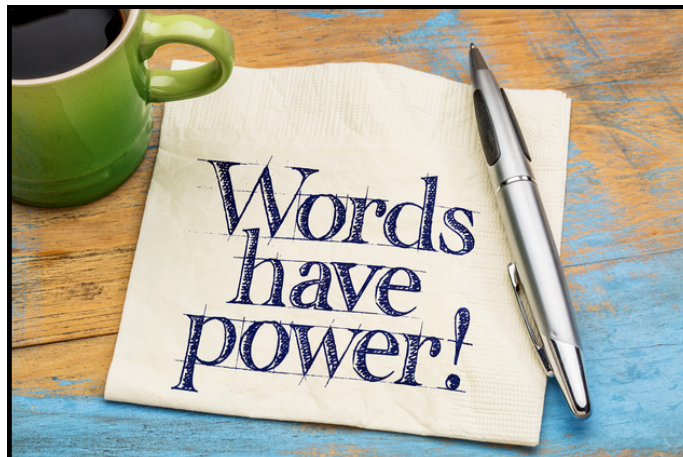
What We Say Matters!

This activity encourages you to reconsider the language you use and reflect on how words can influence children's thinking during risky play experiences.

As previously discussed, intervening too early can disrupt children's thought processes, and once disrupted, their thinking may not regain its original depth.

Reflect on the following phrases and consider your role as an educator, identifying how you can rephrase them to support children's play rather than interrupt it.

"Get down/ Don't climb"	"Be careful"	"You're ok"
"Stop running"	"That's not safe"	"Do you need my help?"



Refer to the **Example Key** section after completing this activity for further suggestions.

Module #3: Example Key

Risk or Hazard Challenge:

#1: *A child climbs a large log that is about knee-high and may lose their balance if they are not careful.*



Risk



Hazard

Explanation: *The child can see the height, assess the challenge, and adjust their movements accordingly.*

#2: *A wooden climbing structure has a hidden loose bolt that could cause part of the structure to collapse.*



Risk



Hazard

Explanation: The danger is hidden and cannot be predicted or managed by the child.

#3: *Children are balancing across stepping stones that vary in height and distance apart.*



Risk



Hazard

Explanation: The challenge is visible, requiring children to evaluate their abilities and make decisions about movement.

#4: *A playground surface contains broken glass hidden beneath leaves.*



Risk



Hazard

Explanation: The danger is not visible and presents an unreasonable threat to children's safety.

Module #3: Example Key

Try It Out: Risk, Benefit, Management:

Risk	Benefit
- Falls from standing or climbing on the log. - Slippery surface in wet or icy weather. - Rotting wood that may weaken over time.	- Gross-motor skill development & imaginative and open-ended play. - Risk assessment skills as children learn to judge height, stability, and how to position their bodies safely.
Management	
- Regular inspections for rot, sharp edges, or instability. - Supervise with intention and ensure appropriate ground surfacing around the log (soft mulch, grass, or natural cushioning).	

What We Say Matters!

"Get down/ Don't climb" "What's your plan if you climb that that log?" "How will you get down, get up, get across?"	"Be careful" "Notice how these rocks are slippery" "Do you feel stable on the log, rock?"	"You're ok" "That was really scary..." "I'm listening, its ok to be sad. Tell me about it"
"Stop running" "Try moving.... your feet carefully, quickly, strongly"	"That's not safe" Talk to the children about consent and safety first! "When we play with sticks, we might get hurt. Does everyone understand this and agree to be careful with each other's bodies?"	"Do you need my help?" "What are you trying to do?" "What could happen if?"



Module #3: Take Away Reflection

Can you identify one example of a risk that provides valuable learning opportunities?

Can you identify one example of a hazard that should be removed or addressed?

How might removing all risks impact children's learning and development?





MODULE #3

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Risky Play Resource Bins:

- Whittling and Carving
- Real Tools
- Hammering with Preschoolers
- Pickler Triangle, Arch & Accessory
- Toddler Climber
- Cooking- Practical Lift (Montessori)

THRC Resource Library
has a variety of resources
to support your Journey.

Self-Directed Learning Opportunities:

- Risk Benefit Analysis for Outdoor Play: A Canadian Toolkit
- Youtube Video: Our Relationship to Risk- Judy Klein

THRC Information & Inspiration Sheets:

Mud Play
Risky Play
Snow and Ice Play

THRC Resource Library **Books to Borrow:**

- Adventures in Risky Play
- Exploring Water with Young Children



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