

Informing Families about the Importance of Risky Play Tip Sheet

Standard 2: Program planning and practices support every child's optimal development in an inclusive early learning and care environment that incorporates the value and importance of play

Risky play can be defined as a thrilling and exciting activity that involves a risk of physical injury, and play that provides opportunities for challenge, testing limits, exploring boundaries and learning about injury risk (Sandseter (2007; Little & Wyver, 2008)

Involvement in risky play gives children the opportunity to access risks and manage situations. Even very young children are taking risks, which in turn lead to new learning experiences, such as walking, running, climbing and riding a bike. Each of these activities involves some risks but they are necessary for the development of children and risky play is not different. Risky play gives children the opportunity to extend their limits and learn life skills. Success and failure provide children with the motivation to try again and work out different ways of doing things (Tovey, 2010, pg. 82). Stephenson (2003) suggests it is this motivation to master a new challenge, and the excitement felt when it is finally mastered that drives children to engage in risky play. Coster and Gleeve's (2008) also found that the feelings associated with risky play such as fun, enjoyment, excitement, thrill, pride, and achievement were reasons children often give for engaging in risky play.

Movements that are often associated with risky play, such as, swinging, climbing, rolling, hanging, sliding, are not only fun for children but also essential for their motor skills, balance, coordination, and body awareness. Children who do not engage in such movements are more likely to be clumsy, feel uncomfortable in their own body, have poor balance, and a fear of movement. The role of a teacher is to create a play environment where children can engage in movements that fulfill their sensory needs (Greenland, 2006, pgs. 189 – 190).

Below are voices from the field on how they inform families in their programs about risky play:

- Having a policy in place
- Making learning visible through learning stories of taking risks
- Informing parents in a handbook about the benefits of risky play.
- Sharing the developmental successes a child can have by pushing their limits
- Sharing with parents in more detail what is allowed in the risky play and what is considered too dangerous to allow. Often families are afraid when they don't really understand where the boundaries of the play exist.
- Sharing with families that the program has given strategies and instructions to the children about a safe risky play
- Ensuring parents know safety is a priority