



PLAY AND RISK BENEFIT POLICY

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PLAY AND RISK BENEFIT POLICY

Riverside Primary School and Nursery recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we aim to provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. We offer a rich choice of easily accessible play experiences for every child by providing a diverse range of opportunities, materials and equipment and enabling access to carefully considered outdoor spaces. At Riverside Primary School and Nursery, we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. We believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. Play creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. These skills link closely to those of Riverside Primary School and Nursery's core values: strive for excellence, make the right choices and build relationships.

1. COMMITMENT

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

2. RATIONALE

Play is central to the physical and social development of all children. Through play children learn how to negotiate, take risks and overcome obstacles. Most importantly, it is through play that children develop friendships and a sense of belonging.

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play and risk aversion have led to a significant reduction in children's opportunities for play. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and behavioural incidents. In addition, classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to children's enjoyment of life and to their growth and development; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Play is essential to the health and well-being of children and promotes the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills. Play can enhance problem solving, encourages a 'can do' approach and through its opportunities for social interaction supports language development, which is vital for all our children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with delayed speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is generated through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a supportive and well managed environment.

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

3. DEFINITION AND VALUE OF PLAY

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) General comment 17:

Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.

We believe play has many benefits, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions, within peer groups, with individuals, and within groups of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures.
- Play requires ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- Play enables children to experience a wide range of emotions and develop their ability to cope with these, including sadness and happiness, rejection and acceptance, frustration and achievement, boredom and fascination, fear and confidence.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

4. AIMS

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.

- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

5. RIGHTS

Our school recognises the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes *the right to play, recreation and leisure* (Article 31) and the *right of children to be listened to on matters important to them* (Article 12). We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

6. BENEFIT AND RISK

'Play is great for children's wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.'

[Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide \(Play Safety Forum, 2012\)](#)

Research studies have found that the social, physical, emotional and intellectual benefits to children of engaging with risk and uncertainty in play are substantial. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences and importantly less fearful of experiences that are new to them. Risky play or playing with uncertainty enables children to place themselves in situations that have a sense of jeopardy and risk without actually over-exposing themselves to the serious likelihood of harm (*Gordon & Esbjorn-Hargens, 2007; Pellis, 2013*)

When creating risky scenarios, like den building and climbing, in their play, children might more accurately be described as being in control of generating the feeling of being out of control. Ellen Sandseter (2010) found that these forms of play (children called 'scary fun') were very important to children. Children develop this scary fun in their play because it's exhilarating and thrilling, gives them a sense of pride and achievement when mastering a new challenge and influences their self-esteem, self-confidence and peer relationships. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures.

Risk and challenge are not limited to physical risk but also include the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure. Risk is an ever-present factor of life and therefore risk management skills are an essential life skill, the development of which is best supported through direct experience in a supportive environment.

At Riverside Primary School and Nursery we are committed to developing a rich play environment and the support children need to develop these sorts of experiences in a carefully managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play and we adopt their stance:

'HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential dangers'. (HSE 2013)

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document [Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach \(September 2012\)](#) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play (see appendix 1).

In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012)*.

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. As outlined in the play sector publication 'Best Play', play provision should aim to *'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm'*.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments the school will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate enriching opportunities for children. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We adopt the OPAL R.A.P.I.D response to risk management which includes Risk-Benefit Assessments, Assemblies, this Play and Risk Benefit Policy, Inspections and Dynamic Risk Benefit Assessments to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's rights and needs.

The benefit risk assessment at Riverside Primary School and Nursery is reviewed annually in line with the Play Policy.

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the following guidelines:

- Recognise the need for professional judgment in setting the balance between safety and goals
- Ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children
- Design spaces where the risks of hazards are clearly apparent
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed
- Provide staff with training to supervise play setting (face to face training and through the OPAL college app)

7. ENVIRONMENT AND CLOTHING

We would advise that all children come to school prepared for outdoor/all-weather play. To be able to enjoy the space and activities, children should always come to school with a waterproof coat. We try to keep all of the school playground space open all year - this means children will play on the field even in the winter months. During the colder and wet weather, children are expected to wear wellington boots and waterproofs on the field, in the woodland area and if they want to play in the puddles. A welly store has been created and families have been asked to provide/donate wellies for use at lunchtimes.

Hand washing facilities are provided both in the classrooms and toilet areas.

8. SUPERVISION

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adults present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. The Play Team will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol our large site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging. We may not be able to see every child all of the time, especially when in the bushes or den building, however the Play Team are designated to an 'area' daily. It is expected that staff will move around throughout lunchtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. All staff follow the school's Behaviour Regulation Policy over lunchtimes and playtimes. For further details, please see the school's Behaviour Regulation Policy.

Our Play Co-ordinator has the role of overseeing the supervision at lunchtimes and may direct the other play team members to take on specific supervising roles if appropriate/necessary.

9. ADULT'S ROLE IN PLAY

We, as a school community, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies- both whole school as well as in class- School Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice platforms.

Adults' role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Riverside Primary School and Nursery.

In addition to this the Riverside Opal Team (Appendix 1) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, the play team and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy.

The OPAL Lead, Miss Porter and Play Co-ordinator, Miss Lawrence will take on the role of 'Play Makers'. They will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. They will ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

The school will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworker's core function is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced playworker is capable of enriching the child's play experience both in terms of the design and

resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Playworkers are a channel of access to new materials and tools and they can act as a stimulus to children to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited.

We believe that an adult's role in play is to:

- Allow the children freedom to explore, take risks and try new things
- Enable children to solve problems and build resilience through explicit teaching and modelling of behaviours
- Be responsive to children's invitations and requests
- Carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness
- Observe and intervene where necessary to develop play opportunities and skills through modelling or playing alongside children

10. CHILDREN'S ROLE IN PLAY

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy and the Play Charter (see appendix 4) has been shared and displayed around school. This includes the rights and responsibilities of the children to:

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences
- Respect and look after each other, their environment and the equipment and toys
- To be aware of consequences surround purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs we will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

12. ENVIRONMENT

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

We aim to provide effective play spaces that:

- Are bespoke
- Are well located
- Make use of natural elements

- Provide a wide range of play experiences
- Are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- Build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- Are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- Allow for change and evolution

A rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

13. REVIEW

This policy will be closely monitored by the OPAL Play Team, SLT and governors.

A working play group, led by the Headteacher, composed of play co-ordinator, play leader, site controller and play governor, will take responsibility for managing the action plan for play.

This policy has been shared by the whole school community.

This policy is under continuous review in line with our OPAL journey.

Appendix 1 Structure of adult roles in practice



The graphic features a background of a green field with a wooden fence. In the top left corner is a circular logo with a tree and waves. In the top right corner is a circular logo with the word 'Opal' and three stylized figures. The title 'Meet the Team' is centered at the top in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Meet the Team

		
Mr R Daniels Headteacher	Miss L Porter OPAL Lead	Ms V Lawrence Play Coordinator
		
Mrs S Anderson Parent Governor	Mr R James Site Controller	



The Play Team



Miss Lawrence



Mrs Dirkin



Ms Rasib



Ms Stringer



Mrs Shan



Mrs Akhtar



Mrs Aslam



Mrs Zaib



Mrs Zeshan



Mrs Iqbal



Miss Iqbal



Mrs Dannoura



Mrs Duckworth



Mrs Giannakaki



Mrs Sareen



Mrs Razaq



CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks¹ and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it

The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance *does not* mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers² should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

² Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.
15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

September 2012

Appendix 3 Risk-benefit advice and record sheet

OPAL's RAPID approach to risk is an essential part of the OPAL Primary Programme

No school should offer the kinds of play that OPAL promotes without a robust and continually updated RAPID plan.

"Health and safety law in Great Britain has an enduring principle – that those who create risks are best placed to control them, and that they should do so in a reasonable and sensible way."

Dame Judith Hackitt HSE Chair 2015

R:	Risk-benefit assessment
A:	Assemblies focused on playtime
P:	Policy for play ratified by your governors or equivalent
I:	Inspections carried out regularly
D:	Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff

The purpose of **risk-benefit assessments** is to enable you to provide challenge, progression, excitement, creativity and fun in your play environment. They cannot and will not provide complete 'safety' and this is not their purpose. They can help you to think about, predict, and manage the most serious and most likely potential causes of harm.

OPAL's approach follows best practice advice from the Health and Safety Executive, The Play Safety Forum, Zurich Municipal Insurance, and local authority health and safety advisory teams.

OPAL has developed the five-part **R.A.P.I.D. response** (see box above) to managing risk in your school approach to play, which should be followed alongside the guidance on managing loose parts and other more risky play outlined in pack 6 and 6A of your OPAL ePack.

1. Risk-benefit assessment (RBA)

All services supporting children undertake risk assessments. The recommended practice for supporting play provision – and all services where the activity is risky but has benefits – is to make the benefits explicit in the assessment process from the outset. This has been recommended practice for all play provision since 2012.

Your RBA is a judgement tool. It is based on your knowledge and professional judgement balanced with the potential for benefit. Your RBAs should be active documents. They should be reviewed regularly and all children and staff supervising play should be aware of their content and use them to guide their play and practice. Every time a new item or section of play is opened up they should be added to. All changes should be communicated with all children and staff.

Common areas that need standing RBAs are:

- boundaries to dangerous areas
- tree management and tree climbing
- fixed play equipment
- broken loose parts and heavy loose parts
- rope tying (especially at height)
- water use and water features
- use of sharp or heavy tools.

You should carry out a written RBA:

- as part of an annual team site walkabout for any agreed significant risks
- when changes are introduced that have a reasonable chance of significant harm
- when your concerns are raised by more than once by staff
- when you have had serious 'near-miss' incidents or very frequent low-level injuries.

Your assessments should cover risks and hazards deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury. A template is provided below. Many others are available. You should adapt or adopt the format that is in usual use in your setting.

2. Assemblies focused on playtime

OPAL play assemblies should be held regularly with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play.

To start, hold assemblies every two weeks, settling to at least once every half term when the children and staff are confident in all aspects of their playtime opportunities and risks.

Assemblies should aim to:

- Celebrate your school's culture of play and children's creativity.
- Inform children of changes, rights, and agreements.
- Negotiate with children on issues such as risk, tidy-up and expected behaviours.
- Innovate around what children are currently playing to deepen children's engagement.

Play assemblies have dual purposes:

- To ensure that all children, staff and parents understand how much respect and regard your school has for the children's play.
- To ensure all children understand the risks and their responsibilities regarding the play opportunities, and that children and staff are involved in agreeing rules and ways of practice.

As part of your health and safety recording, a brief written log must be kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed. (Log on record sheet template 4.7). Further guidance on play assemblies is outlined in guidance Doc 3.4 and in past #TeaWithOPAL events, which can be accessed via the OPAL schools Slack.

3. Policy for play, ratified by your governors or equivalent

A play policy approved by the governing body and leadership is essential and should form the basis for the understanding of all staff and their decision-making about managing risk in play. A template is included in pack three.

This should include formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance (Doc 4.6) and your policy should include a statement on supervision styles (Doc 5.2 GUIDANCE Free range supervision).

4. Inspections carried out regularly

Engineered fixed equipment should have an annual technical inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections should be carried out by a member of staff and a record kept.

In addition, all play team members should be trained to constantly check for and remove hazards as part of their daily practice, with a clear knowledge of what and when to record, as well as appropriate responses.

5. Dynamic risk management and appropriate intervention styles are embraced by all staff

All staff in the playground and those with responsibility for children at play should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action if they think that the risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity of harm while preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

Dynamic risk management in playwork requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. The quality of play will suffer if the adult's attitude is one of hovering, anxious over-attention. There should be an assumption that most play is not dangerous and that children can develop a high degree of competence, given practice, over time. However, staff should also be vigilant, and they should be aware of the kinds of play and resources being used in their patch, who is playing and what the likely risks are.

All play team staff **must** be trained and reminded that active risk management is an essential part of their job using the OPAL online *Playwork Essentials for Primary Schools* course and training book. They should be observant, mobile and attentive at all times.

Most of the time they will not need to intervene but should be ready to:

- **stop the activity or manage the risk** if staff think that *serious harm* (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation) is imminent or probable.
- **remain vigilant and consider negotiating how to manage the risk with the children** if they think that serious harm is possible but not probable.
- **continue ranging supervision** if serious harm is very unlikely.

It is important that new staff joining the play team are trained to the same level as existing staff.

Remember the law does not require you not to have accidents, but to understand the reasons for the risk you provide and to demonstrate the reasonable steps you have taken to manage those risks.

Example of a risk-benefit assessment. These should be brief and clear.

Risk-benefit assessment date: Assessed by:

Description of activity, principle or object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or utility or related policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action date
Large loose parts Falling on children Crushing injuries Heavy lifting Could involve players or bystanders	All those listed in play policy plus – core strength, coordination, cooperation, creativity. Items are essential to a rich play environment.	Agree stacking heights in play assembly. No double size pallets Large dens only in supervised den zone	OPAL lead	
Digging area use of real spades Chopping feet Accidental blows Use as weapon Risk to players and bystanders	All those in play policy – plus Upper body strength Creativity Core strength Enjoyment	Tools not toys training in play assembly Only diggers in the digging zone Only spades, not forks	Play coordinator	
Description of activity, principle or object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or utility or related policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action date



Our Play Charter



We treat each other with respect

We play safely

We share with others

We build positive relationships

We tidy up after ourselves

Every child a **happy player**