

Risky Play

Introduction to Child Development

Peter Nelson

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**Introduction:**

Risky play is the term used to define children's play that is thrilling with the possible threat of physical injury on a child (Brussoni et al., 2015). There is a debate about the benefits of risky play outway the consequences such as injuries or death. Researchers have found that through a child's development, children enjoy risky play and seek out fearful situations (Sandseter, 2009). Risky play falls into six categories of activities, great heights, high speed, dangerous needs, dangerous elements, rough and tumble play, and disappear/get lost (Brussoni et al., 2015; Sandseter, 2009). Great heights is the danger of injury from falling which includes climbing, jumping, and balancing on high objects. High speed is the uncontrolled use of gross motor skills at a pace that can cause collisions with someone or something - swinging from high places. Dangerous tools are knives, saws or strangling tools like ropes that can lead to injuries and wounds. Dangerous elements cliffs water, fire pits and trees in which children can potentially fall into, onto or from something. Rough and tumble is where children can be injured though wrestling or play fighting. Lastly, disappear/get lost where adults lose eyesight or supervision of a child, when the child wanders to explore the environment (Brussoni et al., 2015; Sandseter, 2009). This topic is important, because many parents and caregivers are advising a "surplus safety" and ignoring the benefits of risky play for children (Wyver et al. 2010). In Western society, safety has come top priority when it comes to orchestrating children's play and playgrounds (Sandester, 2019). To understand the purpose of risky play is to understand its relationship to the improvement of a child's development.

**Background:**

Risky play has been in the area of interest since the 70s (Kleppe, Melhuish, & Sandseter, 2017). There has been a decline for children to play outdoors over the years (Prince, Allin, Sandseter, & ÅrlemalmHagsér, 2013). That is why there has been an increase in the number of research of why children should be involved in risky play and what is preventing children. In the past couple of years CBS This Morning uploaded a video on “adventure play”, which is a daycare that allows children to play in a risky play environment. This type of daycare originated from the United Kingdom and now seems to be spreading across the US and evolving some daycares. The main purpose of this daycare is to allow children to explore and use their imagination to build and have a good time. Adventure play represents the benefits that children gain from risky play by applying all six categories of great heights, high speed, dangerous needs, dangerous elements, rough and tumble play, and disappear/get lost.

**Research:**

One of the studies, Early Childhood Teachers’ Beliefs about Children’s Risky Play in Australia and Norway (Little, Sandseter, & Wyver, 2012), used qualitative data asking teacher in Australia and Norway. Each participant was asked similar questions about their beliefs of outdoor and risky play. Within this study, the researchers were able to compare the practitioners answers and concluded the importance of risk play for a child’s development but also the concern for safety. Within this study there were four main concluding points beliefs about risk taking, supporting risk-taking in play, factors limiting opportunities for risky play and outcomes of risk minimisation.

The participants described “beliefs about risk-taking” as attempting new activities out of one’s comfort zone, using keywords like thrill and exhilarating (Little et al, 2012). Supporting Risk-taking in play, the main argument for the defense in risk play is for caregivers to have knowledge of each child’s physical ability and guiding the child through risky play. Factors limiting opportunities for risky play is the liability and supervisors. Teachers enjoy seeing cooperative play, problem solving in these risky play but if an accident occurs, the teacher must end the “game” due to liability. Teachers and caregivers are responsible. Outcomes of Risk minimisation, the teacher stated limiting the child’s risk play could restrict certain development factors for a child like motor skills, and decision making.

Another research experiment took place in Norway. In this experiment, preschoolers between the ages of 4-5 were being observed and videotaped. In this qualitative research experiment, the observation aimed for three of the six categories which were play with great heights, play with high speed, and rough-and-tumble play. Data collected from this experiment was from the preschoolers expressions, bodily, facial, or verbal. From the videotape the researcher was able to identify what the child was doing to cause a certain expression. Each of the categories was divided into three subcategories, exhilaration, fear, and both emotions with detailed conclusions on how the children reacted to risky play (Sandester, 2019).

**Relate your topic to child development and application:**

An important factor to understand children is that risky play is in a child’s nature , to explore their environment, discover what is safe or not, to be a daredevil, and through all of this self exploration improve how to handle risky situations (Sandester, 2019). Children receive enjoyment in conquering their fears, and overcoming something dangerous. A type of enjoyment

that many adults seemed to forget about. Risky play helps improve children's fine and gross motor skills, spatial skills, and risk assessment. Some unaware benefits that children gain from risky play is the potential to enhance physical activity and increase social skills through rough and tumble (Sandester, 2019). With the enhancement of risky play children can increase their gross motor skills which involves the increased strength of muscles and muscle memory to perform actions like running, jumping and climbing. Increase fine motor skills which involves developing hand eye coordination with the use of knives, pencils, and scissors (Berk & Meyers, 2016). Through rough and tumble, children learn how to control their bodies, learn how to play games with one another.

In Erikson's Industry vs Inferiority stage, children react more positively when they feel competence. Accomplishing a risky play from one of the six categories can improve the child's industry, and knowing they conquer the challenge can lead to more positive outcomes. While a child experiences fear, that child falls into the inferiority knowing they cannot accomplish climbing the tree but learn about themselves and their environment (Berk & Meyers, 2016). Risky play continues into Erikson's next stage Initiative vs Guilt. Within this stage children are driven by purpose. They find new activities and tasks that are generally supported by their peers (Berk & Meyers, 2016).

**Call to action:**

In the Sandester article and research states, "This discussion argues that one cannot protect children 100% from risks and challenges, but rather that encountering and learning to manage risks is an important part of children's development." The main concern for all parents, teachers, and caregivers is the protection and safety of the child. But all these adults need to let

kids be kids. Infants learn from falling, infants adjust and adapt to overcome the locomotor problem. The surface of the playground does not change the effect of a child's fall. Safe surfaces tend to increase the injuries of children, the correlation is children attempt more risky play (Wyver et al. 2010). Risky play promotes social interactions, creativity, play time and further enhancing children's health and physical lifestyles (Brussoni et al., 2015).

With the promotion of risky play and acknowledging the benefits from it, children can explore more of the outside environment and set themselves on a straight path for a healthy lifestyle with goals to decrease obesity in early childhood. Risky play seems to be dangerous but it allows children to be themselves and to explore the world around them. Similar to "Adventure Play", with the correct supervision children can start exploring themselves and their environment and access the benefits of improving social and physical life in their future.

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