

## Let's Take a Risk! Sustaining children's natural curiosity and desire to challenge themselves Presented by Niki Buchan

"We deprive children of free, risky play, ostensibly to protect them from danger, but in the process we set them up for mental breakdowns. Children are designed by nature to teach themselves emotional resilience by playing in risky, emotion-inducing ways. In the long run, we endanger them far more by preventing such play than by allowing it. And, we deprive them of fun". (Gray, P. 2014)



Risk risk-taking disposition -persistence in the face of difficulty and uncertainty. Persistence - 'engaging with uncertainty, being prepared to be wrong, risking making a mistake—going on to learn'. Carr (1997, p. 10, cited in Stephenson, 2003, p. 41)

Confident physical risk-takers in the outdoor environment are more likely to take risks during indoor activities. Developed a risk-taking disposition whereby they sought or accepted challenges in both environments. Stephenson (1998)

"A child's right to rest and leisure, and to participate in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child" (Article 31 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990).



**The ACECQA national Law –167** 'An approved provider must ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and hazard likely to cause injury. The service is to have policies and procedures in place to support the protection of children.' '..... services should use risk assessments to identify potential hazards', The National Law does not require services to eliminate ALL risk and challenges from Children's play or environments.'

Dr. Sandseter identified **six categories of risky play**, exploring heights, experiencing high speed, handling dangerous tools, being near dangerous elements (like water or fire), rough-and-tumble play (like wrestling), and wandering alone away from adult supervision.

"Good risks and hazards are acceptable and hold few surprises. Bad risks offer no obvious developmental or other benefits." (Ball, D., Gill, T., Spiegel, B. 2008)

**Benefit - Risk Analysis** = weighing up the benefits of a situation to its related risks  
Beware of catastrophic thinking! We can find risks in anything! Use what has become uncommon common sense! (Niki Buchan)



You can't make a judgment about risk without at the same time making a judgment about what is worthwhile, what may bring benefits to children.



**Benefit-risk assessment** is a value-based exercise dependent on a number of factors: The practitioners knowledge: about children's capacities, their resilience and their ability to make judgments, an understanding of local conditions, understanding the benefits of at least some accidents understanding what it means to say 'some things can only be learnt through experience' – the value and inevitability of making mistakes.

Dynamic benefit- risk assessment should be valued as supporting children's uninterrupted flow in play while at the same time ensuring children are as safe as necessary. (Buchan, N. Children in Wild Nature 2015)

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“One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible ..... spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children can readily appreciate such as heights.....” (Ball, D., Gill, T., Spiegall, B. 2008)

“it is better to risk a broken leg than a broken spirit. A leg can always mend. A spirit may not.” Lady Jane Allen of Hurtwood

‘By taking risks, by facing a challenge, we learn about our competence and our limitations. Trying to exist in a world without some measure of risk is not only impossible but inhibits our lives and the child's need for challenge’.  
Stine (1997, p. 29)

Children develop the frontal lobe of their brain when taking risks, meaning they work out consequences. “You can't teach them that. They have to learn risk on their own terms. It doesn't develop by watching TV, they have to get out there.” (AUT professor of public health Grant Schofield)

If risks are managed constructively during the play process, a “child’s desire to explore further” can be fuelled (O’Brien and Murray, 2006)

Over the last decade (in Australia) when more and more playgrounds were being commissioned with impact attenuated rubber based products we have witnessed a steady 20% increase in the injury rate (adjusted for the population) (David Eager, University of Technology, Sydney. Injury reduction)



Insufficient challenge and novelty in the playground can lead to inappropriate risk-taking as children seek thrills in a fearless manner. (Greenfield, 2003).

Children as risk assessors – Allow children to continue to develop their intuitive response to risk and challenge from an early age and they will become competent self-risk assessors. (Niki Buchan)

Children need the freedom to take risks in play because it allows them to continually test the limits of their physical, intellectual and emotional development. (Tranter, 2005).

Pro-risk educators believe that children are: capable and competent, have a right to challenge themselves, are able to find a balance between their own anxieties and the child’s desire to test and prove themselves.

Every teacher, every caregiver, holds in his or her hands the power to shape a child’s entire future.  
(Pam Schiller)

Don't benchmark down at the level of the most anxious parent. Tim Gill (author)

Don't benchmark down at the level of the most anxious Educator. Niki Buchan (advocate for children?)



**Niki Buchan – *Company Director and Senior Educational Consultant for Inspired EC Pty. Ltd.*** She founded her own Family Day Care, Long Day Care and Pre-schools in South Africa, moved to Scotland in 1996 where she was Head of Morrison’s Academy Nursery which attained Centre for Excellence status. From 2006 Niki worked with Claire Warden delivering Early Years training, leading an action research project, co-authoring books and as Head of the internationally recognised outdoor Nature Kindergartens which under her Headship attained the highest possible status from the Scottish Educational Inspecting body (HMIE). In 2011 she moved to Australia, is known as a strong advocate for children, she is a popular keynote speaker, is involved in delivering training, naturalistic playground design, product design, international study visit facilitator, mentoring. Niki is the author of *“Children in Wild Nature, a practical guide to nature-based practice” 2015*. For more information or to contact Niki as a speaker please e-mail: [niki@inspiredec.com](mailto:niki@inspiredec.com), general enquiries [info@inspiredec.com](mailto:info@inspiredec.com)

Reflections:



Risk is uncertainty.  
Risk is opportunity.  
Risk is misunderstood.



- How do you support children in being their own risk assessors? \_\_\_\_\_
- How do you include children in the risk assessment process? \_\_\_\_\_
- What message do you give parents regarding risk? \_\_\_\_\_
- How can you allow children to develop life skills through real life experiences? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are you risk averse or risk aware, how? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you allow your fears and anxieties to stop children’s play? \_\_\_\_\_