

## Risky Play Policy

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**Quick reference:** risky play | controlled risk | challenge | resilience | physical activity | risk-benefit analysis | child development | supervision | safety | outdoor learning | nature play | educator judgment | risk assessment | hazard control | educational program

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

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- (1) To set out how we supervise and facilitate children engaging in 'risky play' as part of our educational program, with the aim of supporting their physical, cognitive, creative, social and emotional growth and development
- (2) This policy aligns with the National Quality Standard and the Approved Learning Framework, which expect services to provide play-based learning, including risky play, and a learning environment that encourages children to take calculated risks
- (3) It also helps us to comply with the *Education and Care Services National Law*, which requires us to provide children with adequate supervision at all times (s 165) and to protect them from harm and hazards likely to cause injury (s 167)

### SCOPE

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- (4) This policy applies to:
  - 'Staff': the approved provider, nominated supervisor, paid workers, volunteers, work placement students, and third parties who carry out child-related work at our service (e.g., contractors, subcontractors, self-employed persons, employees of a labour hire company)
  - Children in our care, their parents, families and care providers
  - Visitors to our service who carry out child-related work, including allied health support workers
- (5) It applies to all learning environments and activities where children may be engaging in risky play, including excursions

## DEFINITIONS

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- (6) The following definitions apply to this policy and related procedures:
- 'Control measure' is an action to eliminate, prevent or reduce the occurrence of a hazard
  - 'Hazard' means anything that could cause harm or have a negative impact
  - 'Risk' is any situation where the outcome is uncertain, where there is a chance that harm will occur
  - 'Risk-benefit analysis' compares the risk itself with the possible benefits the risk has to children's learning, development and wellbeing. It is conducted as part of a risk assessment
  - 'Risky play' means thrilling and exciting forms of physical play that involve uncertainty and a risk of physical injury (Sandseter E.B.H. *Scaryfunny: A qualitative study of risky play among preschool children* [Doctoral thesis]. Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2010), including (not unsafe or reckless) climbing, jumping, balancing or rough-and-tumble (Nicci McDowell, NSW Department of Education)
  - 'Parents' includes guardians and persons who have parental responsibilities for the child under a decision or order of court
  - 'Staff', unless otherwise indicated, refers to the approved provider, nominated supervisor, paid employees, volunteers, students, and third parties who are covered in the scope of this policy

## POLICY STATEMENT

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### Supporting risky play

- (7) Our physical environment must be inclusive, promote competence, and support exploration and play-based learning (National Quality Standard 3.2), including risk-taking and risky play experiences (MTO Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing)
- (8) Our service recognises that risky play is a natural and joyful part of childhood, and crucial for children's health and wellbeing, and their physical, creative, social, emotional, and intellectual development

- (9) Our curriculum is based on the My Time, Our Place, which recognises that calculated risk-taking in play is an indicator that children are becoming confident and involved learners who are also developing a strong sense of identity, wellbeing and belonging
- (10) We will give children regular opportunities for well-planned risky play, taking into consideration their ages, developmental stages, abilities and interests
- (11) We will ensure that our indoor and outdoor spaces are set up to allow children to climb, balance, build, and explore
- (12) We will provide risky play elements in our environment, such as:
  - Heights and climbing structures
  - Speed, impact and movement
  - 'Dangerous' tools
  - 'Dangerous' elements, e.g., in nature
  - Rough-and-tumble play areas and equipment
  - Areas to 'hide, get lost, disappear' – but which are still visible and accessible

### **Planning and preparation**

- (13) The approved provider must check our service's insurance policy exclusions before approving any new higher risk equipment (e.g., climbing walls, rope courses, jumping castles, water slides) or activities (e.g., rock climbing, swimming in water other than commercial swimming pools, fires)
- (14) Before conducting risky play activities, educators will:
  - Carefully plan the experience, including carrying out risk assessments (see risk management section below)
  - Identify staff supervision arrangements
  - Communicate their expectations and instructions to children
  - Discuss our approach to risky play with parents
  - Check and prepare the environment and equipment to ensure safety and suitability
- (15) The approved provider and nominated supervisor will support educators to run risky play activities responsibly (e.g., through monitoring, training and clear communication, providing the right equipment and resources)

- (16) We will ensure that risky play is inclusive for all children, including those with a disability or other additional needs, in accordance with our Access and Inclusion Policy

### **Risk management**

- (17) The approved provider and nominated supervisor must ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and from any hazard likely to cause injury (*National Law s 167*)
- (18) Educators will be aware that there is a difference between a hazard and a risk. They will take steps to eliminate or control hazards, but use the 'safe as necessary, not safe as possible' approach to allow for managed and supervised risks in children's play
- (19) The approved provider and nominated supervisor must ensure that educators are trained and equipped to carry out risk-benefit assessments to determine:
- Whether a particular risky play activity or situation is an acceptable risk considering the potential benefit to children, and
  - The control measures, if any, that must be put in place to support children's safety (e.g., supervision, clear instructions, talking children through the safety issues, checking equipment for damage, soft fall where appropriate)
- (20) The approved provider must ensure that risk assessments are carried out on external and internal spaces, equipment and furniture to ensure they are safe for children to engage in the planned risky play
- (21) Potential hazards or concerns arising before or during risky play must be reported and recorded according to our procedures

### **Supervision and support**

- (22) Educators must actively supervise risky play activities and use their knowledge of each child, professional judgement and training to decide when to step back and monitor, and when to intervene
- (23) Educators must continually monitor the environment and activity, and modify or stop the risky play if a risk becomes unacceptable or if the children are not behaving in a safe way
- (24) Educators will guide children in assessing and managing risk for themselves, and model safe risk-taking and problem solving
- (25) Children will not be pushed into risky play if they do not feel comfortable; however, educators will give children the support they need to challenge themselves

- (26) Educators must ensure that risky play is never reckless, negligent, coercive or developmentally beyond the child
- (27) Any incidents or injuries that arise during the risky play must be managed, reported and documented according to our procedures (see [Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy](#))

### **Partnerships with families**

- (28) We will recognise there are different community attitudes to risky play, and that some families may have concerns or not be familiar with the concept
- (29) We will always respond to family concerns with respect and reassurance
- (30) We will share current research about the benefits of risky play, and our planning and risk management processes
- (31) We will explain our approach to risky play to families during enrolment and orientation, and give them opportunities to ask questions and give feedback through our usual communication channels
- (32) We will tell families in advance of any planned risky play activities that involve unusual or higher-risk elements – and, where required, we will ensure we have parental consent before we involve a child in such activities

### **Critical reflection**

- (33) We will regularly review our approach to risky play as part of our reflective practice and continuous improvement processes
- (34) Educators will engage in critical reflection on their thoughts and attitudes about risky play
- (35) Educators should collaborate and support each other to feel confident and equipped to facilitate planned risky play at our service

## **PRINCIPLES**

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- (36) We support children's right to explore, test their abilities and play in ways that challenges them, and work with families to create a shared understanding of the benefits of risky play
- (37) We see risky play as crucial to children's physical and mental health, development and wellbeing
- (38) We systematically balance the benefits of risky play with our duty to keep children safe following the approach, 'as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible'

- (39) We thoughtfully plan and actively supervise risky play, and staff are trained and resourced to be able to facilitate the activities
- (40) Risky play is inclusive of all children’s ages, stages, abilities and backgrounds
- (41) We regularly review and make improvements to our program and practices, to ensure they remain safe, challenging and beneficial

## POLICY COMMUNICATION, TRAINING AND MONITORING

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- (42) This policy and related documents can be found in the front office and on our website
- (43) The approved provider and nominated supervisor provide information, training and other resources and support regarding the Risky Play Policy and related documents
- (44) All staff (including volunteers and students) are formally inducted. They are given access to review, understand and formally acknowledge this Risky Play Policy and related documents
- (45) The nominated supervisor runs a professional development program for each staff member, which covers this policy
- (46) Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in this policy and in individual position descriptions. They are communicated during staff inductions and in ongoing training
- (47) The approved provider and nominated supervisor monitor and audit staff practices and address non-compliance. Breaches of this policy are taken seriously and may result in disciplinary action against a staff member
- (48) At enrolment, families are given access to our Risky Play Policy and related documents
- (49) Families are notified in line with our obligations under the *National Regulations* when changes are made to our policies and procedures

## LEGISLATION (OVERVIEW)

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### Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations

Law	Description
s 165	Offence to inadequately supervise children

s 167	Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
<b>Regulations</b>	
s 73	Educational program
ss 85 - 89	Incidents, injury, trauma and illness
ss 103 - 110	Physical environment – Centre-based services and family day care services
ss 111 – 115	Physical environment - Additional requirements for centre-based services
s 155	Interactions with children
s 156	Relationships in groups

### Other applicable laws and regulations

Name	Description
<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i>	Describes the primary duty of care to people in the workplace

### National Quality Standard

Standard / Element	Concept	Description
1.1	Program	The educational program enhances each child's learning and development
1.1.1	Approved learning framework	Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators
1.1.2	Child-centred	Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program
1.1.3	Program learning opportunities	All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning
1.2	Practice	Educators facilitate and extend each child's learning and development
1.2.1	Intentional teaching	Educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions

Standard / Element	Concept	Description
1.2.2	Responsive teaching and scaffolding	Educators respond to children's ideas and play and extend children's learning through open-ended questions, interaction and feedback
1.2.3	Class directed learning	Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choice and decisions that influence events and their world
1.3	Assessment and planning	Educators and co-ordinators take a planned and reflective approach to implementing the program for each child
1.3.1	Assessment and planning cycle	Each child's learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection
1.3.2	Critical reflection	Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation
1.3.3	Information for families	Families are informed about the program and their child's progress
2.1	Health	Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazards
3.1	Design	The design of the facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service
3.1.1	Fit for purpose	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained
3.2	Use	The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning
3.2.1	Inclusive environment	Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments
3.2.2	Resources support play-based learning	Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning.
6.1.2	Parent views are respected	The expertise, culture, values and beliefs of families are respected and families share in decision-making about their child's learning and wellbeing
7.1.2	Management systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service

**My Time, Our Place (MTO) V2.0**

Outcome	Key component
1: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and agency</li> <li>Children develop knowledgeable, confident self-identities and a positive sense of self-worth</li> </ul>
3: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing</li> <li>Children become strong in their physical learning and wellbeing</li> </ul>
4: CHILDREN ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children develop a range of learning and thinking skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating</li> </ul>

Outcome	Key component
1: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and young people develop their autonomy, interdependence, resilience and agency</li> <li>Children and young people develop knowledgeable, confident self-identities and a sense of positive self-worth</li> </ul>
3: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and young people become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing</li> <li>Children and young people become strong in their physical learning and wellbeing</li> </ul>
4: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children and young people develop a range of learning and thinking skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating</li> </ul>

**National Principles for Child Safe Organisations**

**Most relevant principles**

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

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Key Policies	Child Safe Environment Policy   Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy   Physical Environment Policy   Work Health and Safety Policy   Education Curriculum and Learning Policy   Physical Activity Policy   Positive Relationships for Children Policy   Access and Inclusion Policy
Procedures	Roles and Responsibilities – Risky Play (attached)   Health, Hygiene and Cleaning Procedures (in Health, Hygiene and Cleaning Policy)   Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Procedures (in Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy)
Resources	<a href="#">Kidsafe Australia</a>

## SOURCES

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Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations | National Quality Standard | ACECQA’s Risk Assessment and Management Tool | Talking about practice: Adventurous play – Developing a culture of risky play (ACECQA National Quality Standard fact sheet) | Rethinking Childhood (Tim Gill) website resources, including ‘Nothing Ventured...Balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors | Healthy childhood development through outdoor risk play: Navigating the balance with injury prevention – Canadian Paediatric Society | Nicci McDowell - NSW Department of Education | Children’s risky play and mental health benefits – Be You Beyond Blue | Raising Children Network’s Risk in Play: How it Helps Child Development | rituals Exploring toddlers’ rituals of ‘belonging’ through risky play in the outdoor environment – Little, H & Stapleton, M | Mariana Brussoni’s publications on risky play – University of British Columbia

## POLICY INFORMATION

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Approval	Dina Kahn
Review	Reviewed annually and when there are changes that may affect this policy or related procedures. The review will include checks to ensure the document reflects current legislation, continues to be effective, or whether any changes and additional training are required

**Last reviewed: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2026    Date for next review: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2027**

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – Risky Play

### Approved provider responsibilities (not limited to)

Ensure our service meets its obligations under the *Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations*, including to take every reasonable precaution to protect children from harm and hazards likely to cause injury, and ensure children are adequately supervised at all times

Ensure that our service’s governance, management, operations, policies, plans, (including risk management/action plans), systems, practices and procedures for risky play are appropriate in practice, up-to-date, best practice, and comply with all relevant legislation, standards and guidelines

Ensure this Risky Play Policy and related procedures are in place and available for inspection

Take reasonable steps to ensure our Risky Play Policy and related procedures are followed (e.g. through clear and accessible communication, and systemised inductions, training and monitoring of all staff – including volunteers, students)

Ensure that our premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well-maintained, and designed to encourage positive, managed risky-taking activities for children

Ensure that staff are trained and equipped to plan and supervise risky play, and that they are conducting risk assessments that consider children’s individual abilities and needs

Ensure that families are informed about our approach to risky play and that they are given the opportunity to ask questions and/or opt out

Ensure that any incidents related to risky play are managed appropriately, and are recorded and reported to the appropriate authority as required

Regularly review this Risky Play Policy and related procedures in consultation with children, families, communities and staff

### Nominated supervisor / persons in day-to-day charge responsibilities (not limited to)

Ensure our service meets its obligations under the *Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations*, including to take every reasonable precaution to protect children from harm and hazards likely to cause injury, and ensure children are adequately supervised at all times

Support the approved provider to ensure that our service’s management, operations, policies, plans, (including risk management/action plans), systems, practices and procedures for risky play

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are appropriate in practice, up-to-date, best practice, and comply with all relevant legislation, standards and guidelines

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Implement this [Risky Play Policy](#) and related procedures

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Take reasonable steps to ensure our [Risky Play Policy](#) and related procedures are followed (e.g. through clear and accessible communication, and systemised inductions, training and monitoring of all staff – including volunteers, students)

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Conduct, and supervise educators to conduct, regular risk assessment and implement control measures for risky play and environments

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Ensure that risky play activities are carefully planned and supervised

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Provide leadership, guidance and help to educators in balancing children's need for challenge and risk with safe practices

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Contribute to policy and procedure reviews and risk assessments and plans in consultation with children, families, communities and staff. Support the approved provider to notify families of reviews and changes according to legislation and our policies and procedures

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### **Educator / other staff responsibilities (not limited to)**

Follow this [Risky Play Policy](#) and related procedures

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Take every reasonable precaution to protect children from harm and hazards likely to cause injury during risky play experiences

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Conduct risk assessments and implement control measures for risky play activities and environments

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Supervise children closely during risky play experiences, using active supervision and dynamic risk management strategies

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Make sure that risky play is age and developmentally appropriate, and use your knowledge of individual children to maintain the right balance between challenge and safety

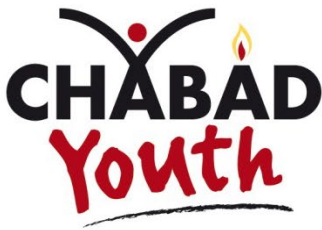
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Communicate to children about risk-taking, safety and decision making before, during and after play

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Communicate to families about the benefits of risky play and how it supports children's development. Tell families in advance of any planned risky play activities that involve unusual or higher-risk elements – and, where required, get parental consent before we involve a child in such activities

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Report any incidents, near misses, hazards or concerns about risky play to the room leader/nominated supervisor/ approved provider as soon as possible

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Follow our record-keeping and reporting procedures for any incidents or injuries relating to risky play

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Critically reflect on your own practice and experiences of risky play

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Contribute to policy and procedure reviews and risk assessments and plans, and participate in training and professional development opportunities on risky play

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**Families responsibilities (not limited to)**

Provide accurate information about your child's abilities, health conditions and any other relevant circumstances that might affect their participation in risky play

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Inform educators of any concerns, needs or preferences you have regarding your child's participation in risky play

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Where you can, participate in surveys, meetings, discussions about our curriculum, including the risky play component of our educational program

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Engage in open, respectful and constructive communication with staff about your child's participation in risky play

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