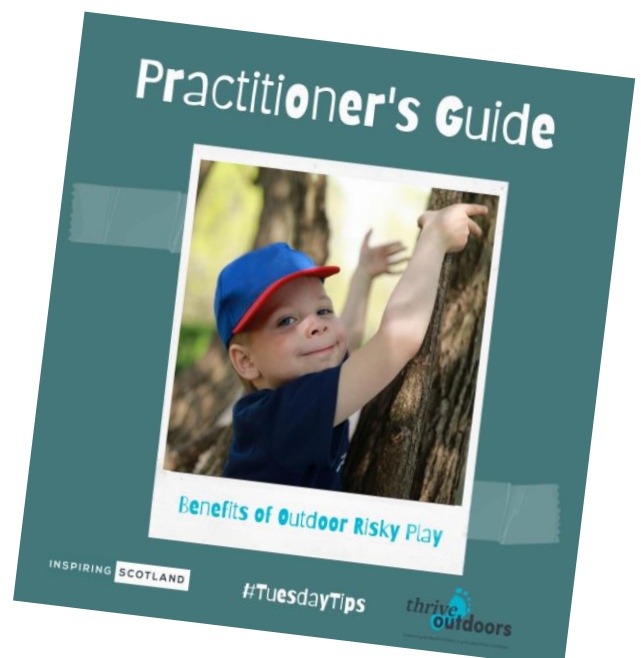


**A Practitioner's Guide  
to  
OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING**  
**The benefits of Outdoor Risky Play!**  
**Guest Blogger : Thrive Outdoors Team**

In this week's **#TuesdayTips** blog we explore the subject of Risky play. You might be wondering ...what even is risky play? and more importantly what are some of the benefits of **#OutdoorRiskyPlay**. Read on to find out!

### So what exactly is Risky Play?

What first comes to mind when you think about 'Risky Play' ...are you intrigued? apprehensive? We are often taught that taking 'risks' can have negative consequences especially when it comes to the children in our care! But risky play can be incredibly powerful for a child's development. Risky play can be described as thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury. Risky play mainly takes place outdoors, often as challenging and adventurous physical activities, children attempting something they have never done before, skirting the borderline of the feeling of being out of control and **overcoming fear** (Sandseter, 2009; Stephenson, 2003). It's not about children blindly taking dangerous risks but it can often be something as small as a child deciding to climb a tree that little bit higher or jump that little bit further. This perfectly sums up what risky play is about at it's core ... it's the child who makes the decision on how far to push their own boundaries.



## So what are some of the benefits of Risky Play?

The main benefit of risky play is that it allows children to **challenge themselves** in many different ways:

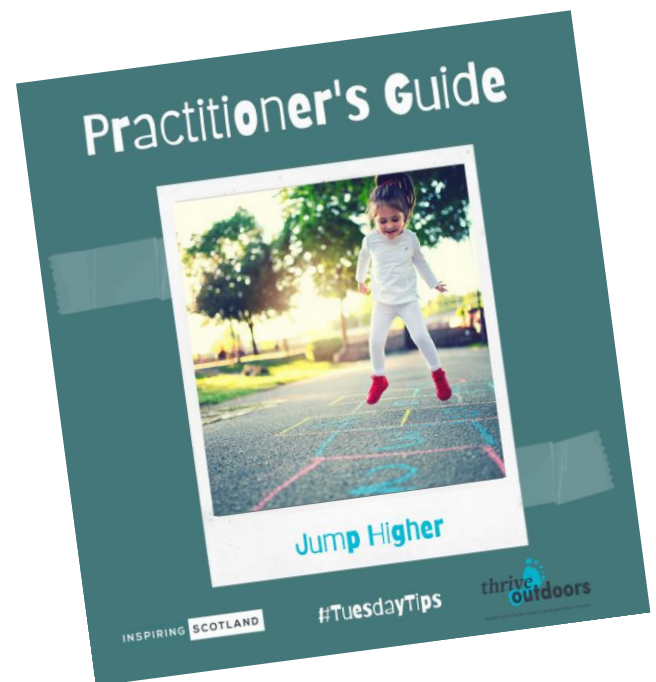
- **Physically** – by climbing a tree, running a little faster or jumping that little bit further
- **Emotionally** – feeling scared but overcoming their fear
- **Mentally** – learning how to problem solve, learning boundaries and that of the environment around them.

## Risk and Benefit in Outdoor Learning....

One of the key foundations of the Outdoor Learning approach is the acceptance of both the benefits of participating in activities outdoors and the potential risks of doing so. Risky play can be such an incredibly important part of childhood. Children need to be kept safe from potential harm and hazards, but they also need to explore and take risks for themselves.

## Top tips on introducing risky play in the early years!

1. **Always assess the risk-** as care givers and practitioners it incredibly important to always assess the risks. An example might be ensuring an area is safe for play before the children come to play in it- removing any harmful objects, then simply letting the children play freely!
2. **Trust children!** It's important to trust children to make their own decisions especially when it comes to risky play. Use your common sense but try to hold back from shouting ' No don't do that -it's not safe!' if you can! (unless it is absolutely necessary in which case a child's safety must come first)
3. **Don't always help straight away-** allow the child some time to figure out a solution to their problem. Again it is wise to use your common sense here. But often a child just needs a moment or two to find their footing for example when climbing a tree or find the easiest, safest way down.



4. **Offer encouragement!** It's perfectly ok to offer up some words of encouragement and gentle advice. Using positive language can really help build up a child's confidence in risky play. Asking some helpful questions such as does that branch feel strong enough? before a child swings on it can help children with their problem solving and risk taking.
5. **Have fun with it!** It's so easy to stress and worry about risky play but the more relaxed you are around the children when they engaging in risky play, the more relaxed and confident the children will be!

## Creating a safe learning environment...

When creating a safe environment for children it is always a care givers legal duty to identify and reduce or eliminate risk, but it's also important to take into account those risks which are acceptable too.

Some of the ways in which to maintain a high standard of safe learning at all times:

- adopting appropriate operating procedures,
- risk-benefit assessments at every setting and throughout
- first-aid provision at every setting
- emergency procedures at every setting

You can absolutely be an advocate of risky play while still ensuring the safety of children. It's key to look at what is deemed as an **acceptable risk**. This could be determined as risks that are easy for children to assess themselves; any risk that engages and challenges children; supports growth, learning and development; and, if an incident were to occur, it is unlikely to lead to a serious or permanent injury (The Sector)

**Enjoy this blog? Do you have top tips that you would like to share?**

**Join in the conversation, add your pictures, or just chat with us at:**

**Facebook @ThriveOutdoorsScot,**

**Twitter @Thrive\_Outdoors**

**Instagram @thrive\_outdoors**

**or by email to [amy@inspiringscotland.org.uk](mailto:amy@inspiringscotland.org.uk)**

### Useful Links

#### References

Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009). Children's expressions of exhilaration and fear in risky play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10, 92–106.

Stephenson, A. (2003). Physical risk-taking: Dangerous or endangered? *Early Years*, 23, 35–43

**The Sector article- practicing risky play in ecec settings**

<https://thesector.com.au/2019/08/01/practicing-essential-risky-play-safely-in-ecec-settings-to-boost-childrens-wellbeing/>

**Further Reading**

**A playworkers guide to risky play**

[http://www.beactivekids.org/assets/pdf/playworkers\\_guide\\_to\\_risk.pdf](http://www.beactivekids.org/assets/pdf/playworkers_guide_to_risk.pdf)

**Outdoor Risky Play Blog**

<https://earlyyearsoutdoorededucation.wordpress.com/outdoor-risky-play-for-all/>