
Bound to Grow: Embracing Risky Play Outdoors



Rivers to
Ridges





What is Risky Play?

Risky play is a type of **child-led, thrilling play** that involves manageable physical risks. It allows children to explore uncertainty, push boundaries, and build skills like **self-confidence, resilience, and risk assessment**.

Core Principles of Risky Play

TRUST

Encourage children to assess and manage risks independently

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Risky play should be voluntary and child-led

GRADUAL EXPOSURE

Allow children to build skills and confidence over time

SAFETY + CHALLENGE BALANCE

Manage risks while supporting exploration

DYNAMIC RISK ASSESSMENT

Continuously evaluate and adapt to risks





Construction

Play with
impact

Vicarious
play

Play with
dangerous
tools

Rough &
tumble
play

10 TYPES OF RISKY PLAY

Breaking
rules

Play at
heights

Play at
high
speeds

Play with
dangerous
elements

Play with
hiding,
disappearing

SCRIPTS TO SUPPORT RISKY PLAY



Responding to Uncertainty

“It’s okay to feel unsure—what’s one small step you could take?”

“You’re in control here; you can stop or try again another time.”

“It’s fine to step back and watch for a bit before trying again.”

“What’s your gut telling you? It’s okay to listen to it.”

Supporting Risk Assessment

“What do you think could be tricky here?”

“What’s your backup plan if this doesn’t work?”

“What could make this feel safer for you?”

“How are you deciding what’s safe enough?”

Building Confidence

“You’re doing great! You’ve got this.”

“It’s okay if it feels challenging—what’s one thing you could try next?”

“You made a good choice by [naming a safe action]. What’s your next move?”

“Look how far you’ve come already!”

Encouraging Exploration

“What’s your plan for getting to the top? Take your time.”

“How does it feel up there? Are you comfortable?”

“What’s the next step you want to try?”

“What are you curious about in this spot?”

“Let’s see what happens!”



Questions for Reflection

How has your comfort level with risky play changed over time?

A large, empty, light pink rectangular box intended for writing a response to the first reflection question.

How can you create more space for culturally responsive & inclusive risky play?

A large, empty, light pink rectangular box intended for writing a response to the second reflection question. A purple starburst graphic is located in the top right corner of this box.



How could you adjust your learning environment to create safer opportunities for risk-taking?

How might you communicate the value of risky play to parents or colleagues?





Resources, References + Readings

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Rivers to Ridges

We are a social enterprise dedicated to contributing to educational shifts to support young people to foster respectful relationships with the land.



Reach
out to us!

We offer educational consulting,
curriculum design,
educator trainings nationally +
outdoor programming for children

www.riverstoridges.org



We gratefully offer gratitude to the beautiful traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. We are committed to supporting Indigenous voices, reconciliatory actions and walking softly.



SCAN ME