RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Learning and playing outdoors

WHAT IS RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT?

Risk Benefit Assessment (or sometimes, Analysis) is an approach to risk assessment that focuses not just on the *risks* of the activity, but on the *benefits* of the activity.

It is particularly valuable in the context of outdoor learning and play and as such as been adopted by Play England, the Health and Safety Executive and other leading education or play organisations as their preferred method of risk assessment.

Risk Benefit Assessment (RBA), starts with the principle that risk is an **essential element** in the development of children's physical, emotional and intellectual development. RBA helps decision makers ascertain whether the level of risk inherent in an activity is 'worth it' – in other words that the benefits children will gain from the activity outweigh the risks associated with it.

Using a RBA approach still means you need to consider how to mitigate risk and clarify how you will deal with risk. A helpful (and sometimes, amusing) way of examining risks is to imagine how children would miss out, if they weren't able to engage in the activity – almost like a 'reverse' risk assessment. For example,

What experiences would children miss out on, if they never learned to light and manage a fire? What risks might they face in future, if they never learned these skills?

When expressed this way, it's easy to show how an activity provides important skills and therefore risk assess to ensure children are able to experience it. By tackling risks in a safe, managed environment and supported by caring, knowledgeable adults, children gain the skills and confidence to take on bigger risks as they grow older.

Risk isn't just about physical actions – for example climbing a tree or skateboarding. It's also about taking intellectual risks – trying anything for the first time, testing new ideas, accepting other people's opinions even (or especially) if you don't agree with them. Children will also encounter emotional risks throughout their lives, so by developing a culture of risk taking in your school or setting, you are helping children develop the resilience, clarity of thought and practical skills to manage tricky times ahead.

MAKING IT WORK IN YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

You should have a working knowledge of risk assessment already – you will have RAs in written form and you'll be risk assessing 'dynamically' at every session.

RBA invites you to think about how you can *enable* exciting activity, rather than *preventing* it. You'll need to look at the **hazards**, and decide whether, on balance, the hazard represents an **acceptable risk** or an **unacceptable risk**.

The outcome might be different for each child, depending on their own ability and confidence levels, as well as the context of the risk - that's where the mitigating factors, or 'precautions', come in.

Use the RBA template overleaf to risk benefit assess some of the activities you already do. Then, when you feel confident using it, ask children what else they'd like to be able to do outdoors, and work through the RBA table together to establish how, together, you can make it happen.

MORE INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION

- Managing Risk in Play Provision – Play Safety Forum / Play England: Download the PDF.
- The Health and Safety Executive's High Level Statement on Children's Play: Download the PDF.
- Play Safety Forum – have a look at their risk benefit booklet and form – Download the PDF
- Read about risk embracing school playgrounds in Berlin: Download a PDF booklet

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity: **Assessor:**

Date: **Review date:**

A good way of deciding on the benefits is to consider what children would MISS OUT ON if they were not able to participate in this activity – almost like a 'reverse' risk assessment!

ACTIVITY	How will children BENEFIT from this activity?	Local context	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall RATING: L/M/H

If you are using this document in Microsoft Word format, the boxes in the table above will expand as you type into them.