

Adult Role in Outdoor Play

“Access to active play and outdoors – and its risks – is essential for healthy child development.”

Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play

Quote from nature.play.co.uk

The Role of the Adult is to Offer:

Permission



Let kids play and allow for child-directed play.

Value play as essential to learning.

Model play by being playful yourself.

Time



Children need time and opportunity for play.

Allow for play to feel endless and be uninterrupted.

Materials



Offer a variety of options including loose parts that can be moved, combined and manipulated. Loose parts have no predetermined purpose for play.

Materials can be synthetic or natural and many loose parts can be diverted waste.

Space



Quality playspaces invite play. They include wonder, excitement, the unknown and the unexpected.

Importantly, the best playspaces are those not controlled or ordered by adults.

Adapted from playwales.org.uk

What to do in the moment:

01

Don't interrupt
Wait and observe, only join in when invited.

02

The 17 second strategy
Give children time to problem solve on their own.

03

Be a learning ally
Let your child follow their play needs. Redirect only when needed.

04

Offer a safe space for play
Give your child safety in terms of the play space and/or a secure base (your lap) to get started.

05

Offer tips for physical skills
Don't say 'be careful' - ask questions or offer tips:
"How do you plan to get across that?"
"If you fall, go floppy and roll!"

06

Don't let your fears become their fears
The benefits of play far outweigh the risks.

Take a Lifeguard Approach

Adapted from Dr. Mariana Brussoni

Observe



Open Attention

Express interest as you watch but avoid interfering in their play. Trust that the child can manage the risks and challenges at hand.

Check-in



Focussed Attention

If/when danger presents itself that may push the edge of acceptable risk, check-in with the child to see if they are aware of the risk. Ask if they are comfortable managing the risk.
If yes, go back to observing.

Intervene



Active Protection

If the level of risk has become unacceptable it's time for the adult to intervene. Take steps to reduce the risks. The goal is to help the child better understand risk when they are playing and give them the confidence to manage it.

Hazards vs. Risks: Adults are responsible for hazards. Risks help your child develop.

Hazard: A danger in the environment that could seriously injure or endanger a child and is beyond the child's capacity to recognize. It is the adult's responsibility to identify and address hazards.

Risk: The challenges and uncertainties within the environment that a child can recognize and learn to manage by choosing to encounter them while determining their own limits.