play AUSTRALIA

POSITION STATEMENT

Growing Through Risk:

Supporting Play & Wellbeing from 9-15 Years

Supported by VICTORIA State Government

An Initiative of Play Australia

Building Healthy Communites through the power of Play.

Supported by Victoria State Government

Authors

Tonia Gray, Jaydene Barnes, Michael Down, and Marion Sturges

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Acknowledgement of Country

Play Australia and the authors and contributors of this work acknowledge the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we are all located and where children have played for over 60,000 years. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

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- **Michelle Barry**, Healthy Cities Australia, New South Wales
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- **Angus Gorrie**, The Outsiders Play Advocates, Queensland
- **Associate Professor Brendon Hyndman**, Charles Sturt University, New South Wales
- **Dr. Alethea Jerebine**, Deakin Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition, Deakin University, Victoria
- **Associate Professor Rachel A. Jones**, University of Wollongong, New South Wales
- **David Kutcher**, Honorary Principal, The Venny, Victoria
- **Dr. Helen Little**, Macquarie University, New South Wales
- **Hyahno Moser**, CEO, Australian Institute of Play, Queensland
- **Dr. Kelsie Prabawa-Sear**, CEO, Nature Play, Western Australia
- **Andrew Reedy**, Director, Play Check, and Standards Australia Committee Member, Western Australia
- **Catherine Shaw**, Head of School, The Nature School, New South Wales
- **Danni von der Borch**, Director of Play, The Venny, The Cubbies, Victoria

Play Australia is the national peak body for play established in 1913. Play Australia's mission is to build healthy communities through play advocatiing for all children's right to play. Play Australi provides information and professional development, and promotes evidence-based approaches to play provision for all Australians.

Executive Summary

Growing up is risky business (Gray et al., 2025a). Risky play is the bedrock of learning from experience and a prerequisite for healthy child and adolescent development. Exposure to opportunities that foster prosocial or positive risk taking during the foundational years helps cultivate lifelong risk literacy skills. The 2026 Play Australia's *Risky Play Position Statement* for children and adolescents aged 9 to 15 years provides an evidence-based framework for comprehending, supporting, and implementing risky play opportunities. International risky play research has almost exclusively concentrated on early childhood (0–8 years). Landmark systematic reviews, national position statements, and regulatory guidance have been produced predominantly centring on the early years. Major professional organisations supporting risky play include the Australasian Society for Developmental Paediatrics (2025), Play Australia (Jones et al., 2025), the Canadian Paediatric Society (Beaulieu & Beno, 2024), and the international Active Outdoor Play consortium (Lee et al., 2025).

While the emphasis has been invaluable, it has inadvertently created an unintended gap: Children and young adolescents aged 9 to 15 years and the adults who work alongside them, are left without evidence-based frameworks tailored to their developmental needs and risk profiles. Further longitudinal research is recommended on long-term outcomes following children into adulthood, specific benefits and cross-national studies, virtual reality modelling for the 9 to 15 age group, dose-response relationships, effectiveness of different implementation approaches, social capital influences (Lee et al., 2026), and cultural adaptations and/or variations.

The position statement builds on the foundations established in *Children Thriving With Risky Play: A Risky Play Position Statement for Young Australian Children* (Jones et al., 2025). Risky play was identified as a critical component of healthy development and wellbeing for children from birth to 8 years and advocated for a benefit–risk assessment (BRA) approach to children's play opportunities. Extending upon Jones et al.'s (2025) seminal work, this risky play statement focuses specifically on adolescents (9–15 years). This age group represents a distinct developmental period characterised by increasing independence, mobility, autonomy, social engagement, and confidence. At the same time, children and adolescents aged 9 to 15 years are navigating significant emotional, cognitive and executive function, and social developmental milestones that can be nurtured through opportunities for developmentally appropriate challenge, exploration, and well-managed risk.

Importantly, the 9- to 15-year age range spans two major educational settings, primary school and secondary school, and encompasses a critical period of transition between them. These transitions are often accompanied by substantial changes or upheavals in social relationships, expectations, identity formation, learning environments, curricula, and levels of independence. As such, this statement recognises the need for a coherent and continuous approach to supporting risky play across educational, community, and recreational contexts, ensuring that adolescents continue to have access to opportunities for challenge, growth, and self-discovery.

In this statement, we adopt Play Australia's identification of risky play as activities involving challenge, exploration, uncertainty, and managed risk, which are fundamental to healthy development for children and young adolescents (Jones et al., 2025). While risky play frequently takes place in the outdoors, its defining characteristic is the presence of thrilling, challenging elements, not the setting itself (Gray et al., 2025a, 2026; Sandseter, 2007, 2009; Sandseter et al., 2023). Further, risky play can take place in supervised settings, including schools and climbing centres, or in unsupervised settings, such as independent play. When children and adolescents are exposed to and guided through sequential skill-building activities through risk-taking opportunities, they develop risk literacy skills that equip them for life. This includes an increase in independent mobility opportunities, such as moving confidently around the community space (Jones et al., 2025; Sandseter, 2009).

Risky play is not unsafe play; it can be defined as **adventurous, challenging, and uncertainty-based** activities that offer developmental benefits through appropriately managed challenges (Eager et al., 2025; Gill, 2007). Consequently, the term "risky play" is widely considered a misnomer (Gray et al., 2025b), and experts such as developmental psychologists argue the word "risk" incorrectly implies dangerous or reckless endangerment. Importantly, however, risky play is distinguished by the minimisation or removal of serious hazards while preserving the valuable learning experiences embedded within risk taking (Ball et al., 2008; Eager, 2024).

A recent trailblazing development in international safety standards is the revolutionary ISO 4980:2023 (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2023), "Benefit-risk assessment for sports and recreational facilities, activities and equipment". ISO 4980:2023 has heralded a welcome shift towards a more balanced, thoughtful, and holistic approach to safety in risky play and ensures that the benefits are fully acknowledged and risks are managed proportionately (Eager et al., 2025; Gray et al., 2025a).

Adolescence marks a sharp neurobiological shift during which reward sensitivity peaks, sensation seeking intensifies, yet impulse control remains immature (Steinberg, 2008). This is the period when adolescents actively seek out risk and simultaneously lay down and reinforce new neural pathways

in the prefrontal cortex (Cservenka et al., 2013). If adolescents are denied healthy opportunities to experience uncertainty and challenge with increasing independence, their outlet for risk taking is manifested elsewhere, generally in harmful, reckless, or adverse behaviours (Cservenka et al., 2013; Steinberg, 2010). Globally, risky play research has focused almost exclusively on children aged up to 12 years, producing systematic reviews, national position statements, and regulatory guidance for this age group (e.g., Gray, Down, et al., 2025; Jerebine et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2025; Tremblay et al., 2015). While this emphasis is invaluable, it has created an unintended gap for adolescents. There is a lack of evidence-based frameworks suited to their developmental needs and risk profiles. This genuine blind spot is not merely an oversight; it is a critical window of opportunity for playmakers, policymakers and those who work alongside this age group.

The child and adolescent brain is neurobiologically primed for healthy risk taking during this period. Yet young Australians are missing out on the proven benefits of risky play, as society has become increasingly risk averse (Gray, Down, et al., 2025b, 2026; Jerebine et al., 2024, 2025). Meanwhile, youth anxiety, screen time, obesity, and sedentary lifestyles are rising, while independence, executive function, and resilience are declining (de Lannoy et al., 2025; Down, Baldock, et al., 2025; Down, Charlton, 2025; Down et al., 2026; Gray, Down, et al., 2025). Prosocial or positive risk taking is an incubator that helps children and adolescents grow and develop. The widely recognised benefits of risky play, including enhanced emotional regulation, social competence, resilience and self-confidence, substantially outweigh any argument to the contrary (Brussoni et al., 2015; Casey et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2025a; Jones et al., 2025).

Recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2024) reveal that as children transition into adolescence, their risk-taking decisions shift towards more complex socioemotional, cognitive and executive function, and physical recreation choices, necessitating an updated "as safe as necessary" framework. We advocate for a benefit–risk assessment (BRA) approach to children's play environments and experiences, where safety is conceptualised by "as safe as necessary" rather than "as safe as possible" (Australasian Society for Developmental Paediatrics [ASDP], 2025, p. 1). This approach requires moving beyond risk elimination towards thoughtful benefit–risk assessment (BRA) that balances safety with developmental necessity.

Child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing are declining in Australia, in part due to fewer opportunities for independence and risk taking (Dumuid et al., 2023; McGorry et al., 2023). This phenomenon perhaps reflects a societal shift towards avoiding harm rather than focusing on encouraging growth and self-discovery (Jerebine et al., 2024, 2025). Sanitised and safety-focused environments can deny children adventure and challenge, limiting their development (Jerebine et al., 2024; Sturges et al., 2023). A recognition of this can position risk taking, particularly risky play, as important for building resilience and wellbeing in our younger generation.

Play Australia's *Risky Play Position Statement* for 9- to 15-year-olds consists of five sections:

- Understanding Risky Play
- Benefits of Risky Play
- Barriers to Risky Play Provision
- A Benefit–Risk Assessment (BRA) Approach
- Statement Implementation Guidelines and Recommendations

The risky play statement document for 9- to 15-year-olds was collaboratively developed by specialists in education, allied health fields, safety, and community experts through iterative feedback sessions. This ensures that the position statement reflects contemporary evidence and practical relevance across multiple settings, as shaped and guided by ongoing stakeholder consultations.

Introduction: Setting the Scene

Setting the Scene

Children and adolescents in Australia are experiencing rising rates of anxiety and depression, with 14% of 4- to 17-year-olds estimated to have a mental health condition (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025), and 19% of young people aged 14 to 19 years are facing high levels of psychological distress (McHale et al., 2023). Several factors are implicated in these rising mental health challenges, such as increased screen usage, sedentary behaviour, obesity, and fewer opportunities for autonomous decision-making, risk taking, and independent mobility (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025; Haidt, 2024; Oswald et al., 2020). Underpinning these changes in children's and adolescents' behaviour is a movement towards a more risk-averse society and a culturally embedded predisposition to prioritise the avoidance of harm over the pursuit of potential gains, self-discovery, and initiative (Eager et al., 2025; Gray, Down, et al., 2025, 2026; Jerebine, Davies, et al., 2022; Jerebine, Fitton-Davies, et al., 2022; Jerebine et al., 2024, 2025).

This systemic risk aversion has been formally recognised by international regulatory authorities such as ISO 4980:2023 (see Eager et al., 2025). In our desire to keep children and young adolescents safe, we have curated benign play environments devoid of challenge, adventure, experimentation, and curiosity. However, risk is not the enemy. Risk is where deep learning flourishes. Research has repeatedly shown that society's fixation on safety and "no-risk play" has impacted children's and adolescents' initiative, resilience, and risk-taking propensity (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025). This position statement argues that risk undergirds resilience, growth, and positive wellbeing, and play, especially risky play, can be seen as one potential antidote (Dodd & Lester, 2021; Gray, Down, et al., 2025; Gray et al., 2025a, 2026)

This risky play statement has been developed through a collaborative and consultative process involving experts and stakeholders from education, health, litigation, and community sectors. The development process included a series of three online reference group meetings to identify key issues, review emerging evidence, and inform the direction of the statement. Draft sections were then shared through an iterative online feedback process, enabling contributors to provide written comments, recommendations, and revisions. Feedback was collated, reviewed, and incorporated throughout the drafting process to ensure the statement reflects diverse perspectives, contemporary evidence, and practical relevance across settings that support children and young people.

Figure 1 below is an artificial intelligence (AI) generated image derived from an interpretation of the consultation discussions, capturing core themes and shared insights in a coherent conceptual form.

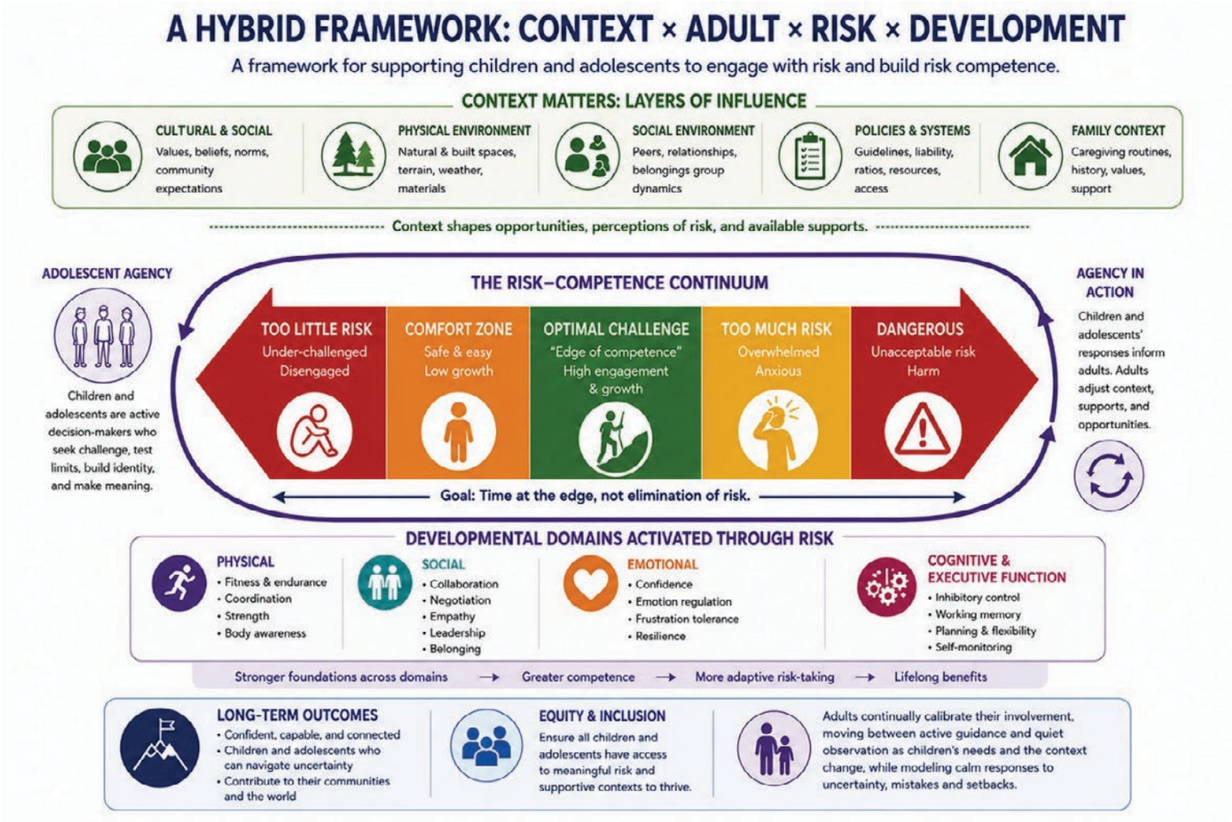


Figure 1: An AI-assisted visual synthesis developed through engagement with relevant literature, iterative consultation with a practitioner group, and written feedback

Section 1: Understanding Risky Play

1.1 Defining "Risky Play"

The term "risky play" is widely considered a misnomer (Gill, 2007). Experts and developmental psychologists argue that the word "risk" incorrectly implies dangerous, reckless endangerment (Gill, 2007). Instead, this form of play is **adventurous, challenging, and uncertainty based**, and is instrumental in building resilience, risk intelligence and risk literacy skills (Gray, Down, et al., 2025). While risky play frequently occurs outdoors, its defining characteristic is the presence of thrilling, challenging elements that involve uncertainty and the possibility of physical or psychosocial consequences, rather than the setting (Gray et al., 2025a; Sandseter, 2007, 2009; Sandseter et al., 2023). We identify characteristics of risky play as a voluntary, exploratory, and self-directed activity in which participants engage with uncertainty, test their personal limits, and manage challenges at the edge of their competence or ability (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Risky play can occur in supervised settings, such as schools, or in unsupervised settings. It can be indoors or outdoors and includes examples such as skateboarding, tree climbing, rock climbing, riding an e-bike, participating in parkour, rough and tumble play, or playing with sharp and/or dangerous tools. The distinguishing element of risky play is that it propels children and young adolescents to extend beyond their current comfort zones while simultaneously permitting them to intuit their own developmental limits or capacities (ADSP, 2025; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). However, what defines risk differs between each person, depending on a number of factors, including their temperament, skill level, or developmental stage. Therefore, risk is subjective to the child; what is risky play for one child may be regular play for another. Success brings mastery and jubilation, while failure offers valuable life lessons through minor injuries.

Risk is a multidimensional concept (Dickson & Gray, 2012) which can involve financial risk taking (buying your first home); physical risk taking (bungee jumping); emotional or psychosocial risk taking (shaving your head); and a more recent phenomenon, digital risk taking (being exposed to digital deception, online subcultures or cybersecurity threats like phishing). Risk in childhood tends to focus on physical aspects, whilst the transition into adolescence also involves emotional, cognitive and executive function, and social risk taking. During this period, adolescents increasingly seek activities that feature independent autonomy, intense challenge, and peer collaboration that resonate with "as safe as necessary" principles (Brussoni et al., 2012; Eager et al., 2025; Jerebine, Davies, et al., 2022). These can be categorised into outdoor or indoor environments, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Outdoor vs. indoor environments

Environment Type	Description	Examples	Key References
Outdoor Environments	Natural and unstructured settings that support exploration, risk taking, and culturally diverse experiences	Climbing and terrain exploration; obstacle courses; adventure-based tasks; self-directed exploratory play; group-based risk activities; water-based challenges; urban climbing contexts	Cox et al., 2025; Gray et al., 2025a, 2025b, 2026; Harper, 2017; Jerebine, Davies, et al., 2022; Jerebine, Fitton-Davies, 2022; Jerebine et al., 2023
Indoor Environments	Controlled settings that enable safe, facilitated developmental experiences through structured programming	Indoor obstacle courses; gym-based adventure modules; structured recreational activities (e.g., indoor rock climbing); exergaming (exercise combined with digital gaming)	Schwarz et al., 2018

1.2 Risk Versus Hazard

It is important that adults who work alongside or with children and adolescents appreciate the fundamental distinction between risk and hazard, as well as the role they play in supporting appropriate risky play (Ball et al., 2008; Eager, 2024; Eager et al., 2025). Risk refers to the possibility of encountering manageable harm that provides developmental and learning opportunities (Jones et al., 2025). These experiences enable children and adolescents to assess situations, calibrate their abilities, develop resilience, and build competence through managed challenge (Gray, Down, et al., 2025).

Examples of acceptable risks include

- Bruises, bumps and breaks resulting from a fall onto an appropriately impact-attenuated surface;
- an injury resulting from playing a refereed team sport such as netball, soccer, or AFL;
- scrapes or bruises during play;
- falling onto a hard surface while skateboarding, participating in parkour, or engaging in similar activities;
- social risk of rejection when joining a peer group;
- emotional risk of failing at a challenging task;
- navigating beyond adult sight lines.

A hazard refers to a potential source of serious harm that poses unacceptable danger without developmental benefit (Eager, 2024). As much as possible, hazards should be reduced, eliminated, or managed. Hazards offer no learning value and pose serious injury or fatality risks (Ball et al., 2008; Eager et al., 2025).

Examples of hazards include

- entrapment situations (head and neck entrapment that create potential strangulation hazards);
- falls from height onto hard surfaces;
- drowning from water-related activities;
- traffic adjacent to play areas;
- toxic substances such as lead, asbestos, and chromated copper arsenate (CCA);
- excessive levels of ultraviolet radiation;
- sharp edges from broken play structures;
- being bitten by a venomous snake or spider;
- drug and alcohol taking;
- standing on an elevated space during an electrical storm;
- standing beneath a gum tree containing dead branches during a storm.

The fundamental principle is that appropriate risky play environments eliminate hazards while preserving valuable risks (ASDP, 2025; Play England, 2008).

1.3 What Risky Play Is Not

A common misunderstanding is that risky play is synonymous with unsafe, reckless, or unsupervised behaviour (Beaulieu & Beno, 2024; Brussoni et al., 2015). While risky play can involve moments of impulsiveness or misjudgement, it is not inherently unsafe. The crucial distinction lies between healthy and unhealthy risk taking: Healthy risky play involves age-appropriate challenges offered within environments that are thoughtfully designed and supported to help children and adolescents test limits, build competence, and learn to manage uncertainty (Eager et al., 2025; Sturges et al., 2023).

Any misunderstanding between the two creates significant resistance to developmentally appropriate risk taking and requires explicit clarification.

Risky play can be characterised by:

- thoughtfully designed environments where hazards are removed but developmentally beneficial risks remain;
- age-appropriate challenges matched to children's and adolescents' developmental capabilities;
- opportunities for progressive skill development and calibrated or sequential risk taking;
- supervision through dynamic risk assessment rather than constant intervention;
- environments where limits are tested within a supportive framework;
- respect for child and adolescent agency while providing appropriate safety measures.

Risky play is not:

- negligent supervision or abandonment of children or adolescents to dangerous situations;
- exposure to serious hazards without appropriate controls;
- encouragement of reckless behaviour without consideration of consequences;
- equipment or environments in poor condition or disrepair;
- activities beyond children's or adolescents' developmental capacity;
- situations where adults have not conducted appropriate benefit–risk assessment (BRA).

1.4 Acknowledging Challenges in the Use of the Word "Risky"

The term risky play presents inherent communication challenges (Gill, 2007; Lee et al., 2025). In contemporary risk-averse culture, the word "risk" carries predominantly negative connotations, often evoking danger, liability, and harm rather than opportunity, growth, and development. This linguistic framing can trigger immediate resistance from stakeholders, obscure developmental benefits beneath safety concerns, and conflate appropriate challenge with recklessness. Alternative terminology exists, including "adventurous play" (Gray et al., 2025a, 2026; Jerebine et al., 2024), "challenging play" (Play England, 2008), and "thrilling play" (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). However, the use of the term risky play remains the established research term with a substantial evidence base and international recognition.

Therefore, we have adopted Play Australia's explicit use of the term risky play while acknowledging its limitations and potential to trigger resistance. To challenge societal attitudes, it is profoundly important to reframe risk as a developmental opportunity rather than a threat. Children and adolescents do not typically experience risky play as risky in the same way that adults who focus on safety do (ASDP, 2025; Gray et al., 2025a, 2026). For this cohort, risky activities represent adventure, bravery, challenge, experimentation, independence, and thrill seeking. Understanding their goal-directed motivation helps adults shift from fear-based restriction towards benefit-focused provisioning (ASDP, 2025).

1.5 Dimensions of Risk in Play

Risky play is how children and adolescents explore, discover, fail, succeed, socialise, and flourish, and it encompasses multiple dimensions beyond physical challenges (Gray et al., 2025a). As the prefrontal cortex continues to develop and children and adolescents seek greater independence, the kinds of risks they engage in begin to change. What starts as mainly physical challenge becomes more complex, extending into social, cognitive and executive function, and digital spaces. These experiences provide opportunities for growth, helping to build judgement, confidence, and the capacity to navigate increasingly complex situations (Braams et al., 2015; Caballero et al., 2016). The aim is to build risk literacy and risk-handling skills in 9- to 15-year-olds, helping them to become more proficient, resilient, and resourceful risk technicians equipped to encounter the myriad risks and challenges encountered throughout their lifetime.

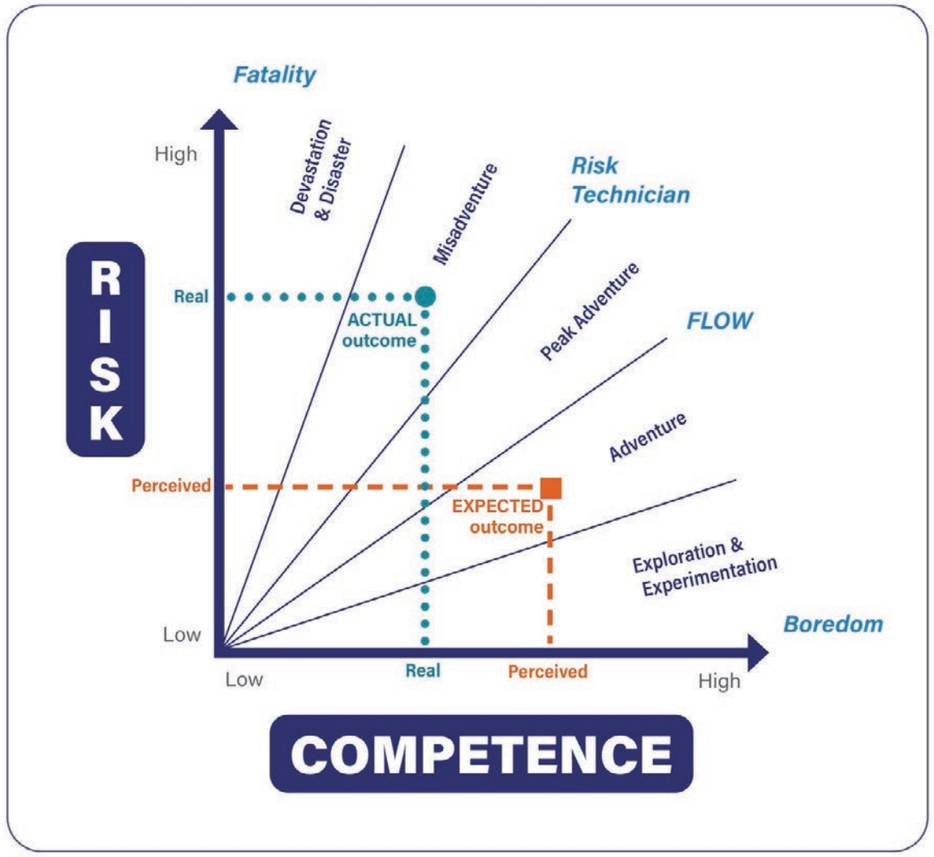
Table 2 maps five different risk domains—including physical, social, emotional, cognitive and executive function, and digital—describing them and offering some examples of what these may look like for children and adolescents.

Table 2: Risk domains and examples

Risk Domain	Description	Examples
Physical Risk	Risks arising from bodily movement, environmental interaction, and engagement with physical challenge and uncertainty	Play at height (climbing trees, rocks, structures); play at speed (running, cycling, sliding); play with dangerous elements (water, supervised fire, rough terrain); rough and tumble play (wrestling, play fighting, physical contact); play with tools requiring skill and care
Social Risk	Risks associated with interpersonal interaction, group participation, and social positioning within peer contexts	Joining new peer groups with possible rejection or exclusion; taking leadership roles with potential challenge; negotiating conflict and relationship strain; performing for peers with risk of embarrassment; forming new friendships involving vulnerability; navigating peer hierarchies and dynamics
Emotional Risk	Emotional regulation and vulnerability in social contexts	Facing fears; expressing vulnerability; managing failure and disappointment; tolerating uncertainty; self-disclosure of thoughts and feelings; places to hide or disappear
Cognitive Risk	Thinking, reasoning, and learning processes where outcomes are uncertain	Problem-solving with risk of failure; creative expression with risk of criticism; intellectual debate with risk of being wrong; strategic decision-making in games; learning new skills during initial incompetence phases
Cyber and Digital Risk	Participation in online environments involving identity, reputation, and social comparison	Navigation of online identities or subcultures e.g. the manosphere's impact on adolescent mental health (McNicholas & Harris, 2026); privacy issues; social comparison pressures; managing digital literacy (Lau-Zhu et al., 2023; Odgers & Jensen, 2020)

In addition, Martin and Priest's (1986) seminal model illustrates how risk taking, adventure, and challenge can enhance self-concept and self-actualisation by individuals becoming astute perceivers of self-competence and situational risk. The model (see Figure 2) assumes that "peak adventure", the point at which personal competence perfectly matches and balances situational risk, is the goal sought by self-motivated individuals. This model uses risk and competence as diagram axes with exploration and experimentation, adventure, peak adventure, misadventure, and disaster and devastation completing the framework. The key to achieving peak adventure and applying the model, lies in the individual's perceptions of risk and their competence or ability level. The flow state or peak adventure it achieved when a person's competence and risk level are perfectly matched (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

Figure 2: The interplay between risk and competence (adapted from Martin & Priest, 1986)



A factsheet included in Appendix A provides a table with specific examples of each zone. These examples were developed by adolescents and practitioners. It includes some potential strategies for unpacking the role of the practitioner.

Section 2: Benefits of Risky Play

2.1 Brain Development

The period between 9 and 15 years represents a critical phase of neurodevelopment marking a dynamic transition towards behavioural autonomy. This stage is characterised by a normative surge in sensation seeking, which increases an individual's affective attraction to novel and risky experiences (Romer, 2010; Romer & Hennessy, 2007). The prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions including planning, decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation, undergoes substantial maturation during this period, continuing development until approximately age 25 (Arain et al., 2013; Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025). At the same time, the limbic system governing emotion processing and reward-seeking behaviours develops more rapidly, creating a developmental asynchronous pattern (Casey et al., 2011).

Traditional neurobiological frameworks frequently attribute this heightened risk taking to a structural or functional imbalance ("dual-systems model"). It has been argued that time spent with peers of similar ages selectively amplifies activation in reward regions like the ventral striatum and orbitofrontal cortex before the prefrontal control network is fully matured (Chein et al., 2010). However, contemporary research challenges these stereotypes.

Instead of reflecting macrostructural brain deficits, an adolescent's vulnerability stems primarily from a lack of real-world experience with adult situations (Romer, 2010; Romer et al., 2009). Sensation seeking serves an adaptive evolutionary purpose by driving environmental exploration within ambiguous risk contexts (Romer et al., 2017; Zuckerman, 2007). This argument is supported by ecological studies demonstrating that voluntary engagement with physical risks, such as those offered through opportunities to engage in risky play, allows adolescents to expand their cognitive maps and refine their perception–action loops,

serving as an incubator for more efficient real-world risk assessment and management capabilities without a substantial increase in objective danger or injury (Brussoni et al., 2026). During this neurobiological window, risky play serves essential functions, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Risky play and the neurobiological window: examples of function and/or features

Function	Feature or Descriptor
Neural connectivity development	Risk taking in managed contexts exercises neural circuitry, strengthening connections between the prefrontal cortex and limbic system that enable mature self-regulation (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025).
Executive function enhancement	Challenge and uncertainty require planning, problem-solving, risk assessment, and adaptive thinking—capacities housed in the developing prefrontal cortex (Eager et al., 2025; Gray, Down, et al., 2025).
Risk intelligence and/or risk literacy	Experiences with manageable risks teach adolescents to assess situations, adjust behaviour, weigh consequences, and develop calibrated responses to uncertainty (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025).
Emotional regulation capacity	Facing fears and managing uncertainty in risky play contexts builds capacity to regulate emotions and cope with stress across life domains (Beaulieu & Beno, 2024; Dodd & Lester, 2021).
Synaptic pruning and myelination	The adolescent brain undergoes neural pruning (eliminating unused connections) and myelination (enhancing used connections). Risky play experiences influence which neural pathways are strengthened and retained (Arain et al., 2013).

2.2 Social and Emotional Development Resilience and Confidence Building

Risky play provides developmentally critical opportunities for children and adolescents aged 9 to 15 years. These experiences allow this age group to test personal limits, discover capabilities, experience challenge–struggle–mastery cycles that build genuine confidence, develop courage through facing age-appropriate fears, learn recovery from setbacks, and gain authentic self-esteem rooted in actual accomplishments (ASDP, 2025; Brussoni et al., 2015; Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025). Risk taking in adolescence is markedly different than in earlier years, with the transition into adolescence marking the end of purely concrete thinking and the beginning of the ability to imagine multiple "what-if" scenarios (ASDP, 2025; Lehalle, 2020). While this is a sign of intellectual growth, it often carries the side effect of a feeling of personal invincibility that can drive adolescents to take dangerous or antisocial risks (Christie & Viner, 2005). Lightfoot (1997) argued that risk taking contains a functional utility, serving as a symbolic performance to gain peer respect and foster group cohesion, acting as a "collective biography" shared among peers.

Against this backdrop, the uncertainty inherent in risk taking gives participants an opportunity to test their boundaries and gain a sense of mastery, with negative outcomes often reframed as vital experiences for personal growth and identity formation. Lupton and Tulloch (2002) noted that the embodied joy of risk taking sits in stark contrast to the mundanities of daily life, with the adrenaline rush of a risky activity providing a welcome means of escape from the mundane. The pursuit of heightened risk taking primarily occurs during adolescence, with a noted peak around early to middle adolescence, followed by a decrease at the end of adolescence and into early adulthood (Braams et al., 2015; Casey, 2015; Icenogle et al., 2017; Kim-Spoon et al., 2016; Steinberg, 2005, 2008).

During this developmental period, peer relationships become increasingly central (Tomova et al., 2021). Risky play across multiple dimensions facilitates negotiation and cooperation, trust development through mutual support, the emergence of leadership and followership skills, conflict resolution, strong peer bond formation, and navigation of social hierarchies (ASDP, 2025). Extant research reveals that children—and subsequently adolescents—with access to risky play opportunities demonstrate well-developed social behaviour, independence, and conflict resolution skills compared to peers with restricted exposure (Brussoni et al., 2015; Hyndman, 2017).

2.3 Identity Formation and Autonomy

The 9- to 15-year age range is critical for developing independence and self-concept. Risky play encourages goal-directed behaviour, autonomy through independent decision-making, identity exploration through testing capabilities, a sense of agency and internal locus of control, understanding of personal risk appetite, and value formation through experience (ASDP, 2025). In addition, we acknowledge that children and adolescents with disabilities or diverse needs benefit significantly from time in outdoor environments and opportunities to engage in risky play. However, in contemporary society children and adolescents are often overprotected or bubble wrapped by helicopter parents (Gill, 2007; Gray, Dallat & Jackson, 2025). As such, thoughtful consideration is required to ensure they are appropriately supported to access these experiences, enabling them to develop their identities and build autonomy.

2.4 Mental Health and Wellbeing Anxiety Prevention and Stress Reduction

Contemporary research demonstrates clear associations between risky play and positive mental health outcomes:

- Risky play interventions reduce anxiety sensitivity and improve fear management capacity (Dodd & Lester, 2021).
- Adventurous play functions as natural exposure therapy through graduated or sequential challenge (Dodd & Lester, 2021).
- Physical activity inherent in risky play reduces stress hormones and promotes positive affect (Gray, Down, et al., 2025).
- Nature-based risky play provides additional mental health benefits through environmental connection, supporting active outdoor play, connection to nature, and environmental stewardship (de Lannoy et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2025).
- Mastery experiences build self-efficacy, providing protection against depression and anxiety (Beaulieu & Beno, 2024).

Position statements from the ASDP (2025) and the Canadian Paediatric Society (Beaulieu & Beno, 2024) identify risky play as a critical intervention in the child and adolescent mental health crisis. Gray, Down, et al.'s (2025) scoping review suggests that a decline in self-directed, independent outdoor play is contributing to deteriorating mental wellbeing in contemporary youth. During a period of escalating mental health challenges among 9- to 15-year-olds, risky play offers a developmentally appropriate, accessible, evidence-based protective factor warranting active promotion rather than restriction (ASDP, 2025).

2.5 Physical Development and Health

Risky play involving climbing, jumping, balancing, and navigating challenging terrain promotes fundamental movement skills, physical literacy, strength, coordination, spatial awareness, vestibular system development, proprioception, and motor skill refinement (Hyndman, 2017). Research consistently demonstrates that risky play environments generate significantly higher levels of physical activity compared to conventional playgrounds. Children engaged in risky play demonstrate substantial increases in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (Hyndman, 2017), contributing to cardiovascular health, musculoskeletal development, and the establishment of lifelong physical activity patterns.

Brussoni et al.'s (2015) systematic review found that the physical activity benefits of risky play substantially outweigh injury risks. Umbrella reviews confirm that active play is associated with robust health outcomes across childhood and adolescence (de Lannoy et al., 2025). To support balanced risk taking, the AIHW (2024) and the Australian Sports Commission (n.d.) provide crucial contextual data regarding injuries across the lifespan (see Table 4).

Table 4: By different age groups, leading causes of injury and context

Age Group	Leading Causes and Injury Characteristics (AIHW, 2024)	Primary Context and Statistical Insights
Infants and toddlers (0–4 years)	Accidental drowning, transport accidents, and falls; highest rate of injury-related emergency department presentations	74% of total injuries in this age range occur at home.
Children (5–9 years)	Falls stand as the most common cause of injury	23% of total injuries in this age range occur at school.
Adolescents (10–14 years)	Marked escalation in sport, exercise, and recreation injuries, comprising 32% of total injuries in this age group; represents the highest rate of recreational injuries across the lifespan	Top hospitalisations stem from cycling (16%, 3,000 cases), roller sports (10%, 1,800 cases), and Australian Rules Football (9%, 1,750 cases).

Note. From Australian Sports Commission (n.d.).

These data underscore that while younger children experience localised falls, early adolescents face a distinct rise in sport-, exercise-, and recreation-based injuries as they transition to more autonomous, high-velocity activities.

2.6 Financial and equity benefits

Risky play can also provide financial and equity benefits. Informal, local and community-based play opportunities can reduce reliance on paid, structured or commercial activities, making developmental play more accessible for families. This is particularly important where cost is a barrier to participation, and where free or low-cost public spaces can provide meaningful physical, social, emotional and cognitive benefits.

Section 3: Barriers to Risky Play Provision

3.1 Risk-Averse Institutional Culture

Contemporary society and educational settings face substantial barriers to providing risky play opportunities (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025; Hyndman, 2025; Jerebine, Davies, et al., 2022; Jerebine, Fitton-Davies, et al., 2022; Jerebine et al., 2024). These include

- safety-prioritisation mandates emphasising risk elimination over benefit–risk, balancing standardised testing pressures, and reducing unstructured play time;
- restrictive playground policies prohibiting running, climbing, and rough play;
- removal of challenging equipment following minor injury incidents;
- increased supervision expectations enabling constant adult intervention;
- elimination of natural features in favour of flat, sanitised spaces;
- weather-triggered indoor recess policies;
- emphasis on structured activities over self-directed free play.

Our risk-averse culture creates what Gray, Dallat, and Jackson (2025) described as "hermetically sealing children from harm or risk exposure yet, paradoxically, creating a deficit in mental toughness and resilience" (p. 37). Community environments similarly restrict risky play through over sanitised playground design, removal of natural play features following liability concerns, prohibitions on climbing activities, elimination of loose parts and manipulable materials, age-segregated spaces preventing mixed-age play, and excessive signage warning against adventurous activities.

3.2 Liability and Insurance Concerns

Liability and insurance frameworks present significant barriers to risky play provision (Ball et al., 2008; Eager, 2024; Eager et al., 2025). A key barrier to implementing risky play in schools is the widespread influence of litigation fear, which often drives a default towards risk elimination rather than risk management. This is frequently compounded by insurance requirements that are misinterpreted as mandating zero-risk environments, alongside misunderstandings of legal duties—particularly the assumption that all injuries must be prevented, rather than the actual obligation to remove hazards and manage foreseeable risks appropriately. As a result, defensive decision-making becomes common practice, reinforced by a lack of clarity around supervision standards.

Research highlights a persistent gap between perceived and actual legal and insurance requirements (Ball et al., 2008; Play England, 2008; Slovic, 2000). In practice, most insurers support benefit–risk approaches when these are properly documented, and legal duties are centred on appropriate risk management rather than the elimination of all possibility of harm. Well-constructed benefit–risk assessments (BRA) therefore provides legal protection, and case law increasingly acknowledges that some level of risk is both inherent in childhood and beneficial to development.
Effective responses to these barriers include the provision of clear, practical guidance for schools and organisations on BRA, alongside targeted education for the insurance sector regarding the developmental value of managed risk. Strengthening legal precedents that support appropriate risky play provision, offering clearer protections for adults who supervise such activities in line with professional standards, and expanding professional development in documentation and risk management would collectively support more consistent and confident implementation.

3.3 Parental and Adult Perceptions

Contemporary barriers to risky play also arise from broader cultural and parenting trends that shape adults' perceptions of safety and supervision. These include "helicopter parenting" practices characterised by constant monitoring and limited child autonomy, alongside heightened parental fears of injury, abduction, and other statistically rare events. Social comparison pressures and peer norms around safety further reinforce cautious decision-making, while media amplification of isolated but dramatic child harm incidents intensifies perceived risk. Generational shifts also play a role, with many parents having experienced greater outdoor freedom in their own childhoods, creating a complex tension between past and present norms. In addition, digital alternatives are often viewed as comparatively "safer" than outdoor adventure and increasing time constraints and scheduling pressures reduce opportunities for unstructured play.

Adult anxiety transfer is a significant mechanism in this context, with research indicating that parental fear can communicate reduced confidence in children's competence (ASDP, 2025; Sturges et al., 2023, 2026). Children may internalise these anxieties, becoming more risk averse, while "hovering" supervision can signal an expectation of incapacity, limiting opportunities to develop independence. Similarly, adult discomfort with children experiencing struggle or manageable failure can impede the development of resilience and problem-solving skills.

Effective approaches to addressing these barriers include targeted education for parents on the developmental benefits of risky play, supported by neuroscience and paediatric evidence; graduated exposure opportunities that allow parents to observe a child's growing competence; and the development of community networks that normalise adventurous play. Transparent communication about supervision and risk management approaches, meaningful parent involvement in benefit–risk assessment (BRA) and reframing risky play from "dangerous" to "learning-focused" experiences (Beaulieu & Beno, 2024; Sturges et al., 2023) further support cultural change.

3.4 Insufficient Professional Training

Gaps in educator and youth worker preparation present critical barriers (Ball et al., 2008; Hyndman, 2025). Preservice training gaps exist because most initial teacher education programs omit content on risky play and benefit–risk assessment (BRA), emphasising safety compliance rather than developmental provisioning, and include limited material on outdoor learning and adolescent neuroscience.

In-service professional development limitations include a lack of practical skill development in dynamic risk assessment and inconsistent messaging between safety compliance and developmental benefits. Consequences include educators defaulting to risk elimination, overintervening during play, and missing opportunities for rich play provision. Effective approaches include integrating risky play and BRA into preservice education, offering accessible professional development, mentoring, and establishing clear frameworks and tools for BRA.

Section 4: A Benefit–Risk Assessment (BRA) Approach: A Framework for Decision-Making

Traditional approaches prioritise risk elimination by identifying all possible risks, removing or restricting access, maximising safety through constant supervision, and designing for zero injuries regardless of developmental cost (Eager, 2024; Eager et al., 2025). This approach removes developmental opportunities alongside hazards, creates underchallenging environments that fail to build competence, and transfers responsibility to adults. However, paradoxically, this increases the risk of serious injury in the long term through the development of incompetence and contributes to mental health challenges, physical inactivity, and poor risk assessment skills. The recent advent of ISO 4980:2023, the benefit–risk assessment (BRA) for sports and recreational facilities, activities, and equipment, is a gamechanger. Paediatricians, educators, and safety experts have long argued that personal growth and learning occur through exposure to risk and that failure is an enrichment opportunity. These experiential learning opportunities offer a potent vehicle for developing an adolescent's resilience, executive function, and risk intelligence.

Essentially, this new advancement in safety standards effectively permits children and young adolescents to sharpen their risk literacy skills and become better risk technicians. Educators need to reframe risk within a benefit–risk context that acknowledges a child's or adolescent's innate capacity to intuit their own personal limits. In addition, this will empower young people to assess, manage, and learn from uncertainty, especially when teachers or adults provide the right scaffolds.

The main steps involved in a benefit–risk assessment (BRA) include the following:

- **Step 1:** *Identify context and benefits*.
- **Step 2:** *Identify and assess risks.*
- **Step 3:** *Distinguish risks from hazards.*
- **Step 4:** *Implement controls.*
- **Step 5:** *Document and communicate.*
- **Step 6:** *Monitor and adjust accordingly.*

Eager et al. (2025) developed a practical assessment tool with a key decision framework:

- High benefit + low risk = strongly support
- High benefit + moderate risk = support with appropriate controls
- High benefit + high risk = redesign to reduce or mitigate risk while preserving benefit
- Low benefit + high risk = eliminate
- No benefit + any risk = eliminate (this constitutes a hazard)

Every benefit–risk assessment (BRA) is different, and the context plays an important role in assessing the benefit–risk of specific activities. The context can affect decisions. Gill (2017) maintained that children's and adolescents' risky play is unpredictable. He argued that it is impossible to predict with certainty how risky play sessions will unfold in every scenario. A key part of benefit–risk management is how you, the adult, respond to the unexpected. This is called dynamic risk management (DRM).
The DRM is a powerful tool that allows educators, activity leaders, and participants to assess benefits in situ and the risks in real time. It is particularly useful in structured activities or in educational settings (ISO 4980:2023). Further, the competency level of the child or adolescent influences the benefit–risk decision, as does local policy. If the user is new to an activity, the child or adolescent may experience higher risk compared to one who is highly competent in the activity and therefore has a lower risk [ISO 4980:2023].

Benefit Examples

The following is a list of some possible benefits taken from the Australian Standard (AS 2316.2.1:2025):

- team building
- skill mastery
- creativity
- problem-solving
- balance and vestibular stimulation
- upper body and core strength
- climbing skills
- reducing the fear of heights
- exercise
- building confidence and independence
- gross motor skills
- lowers obesity
- enjoyment
- self-efficacy
- self-confidence
- trust building
- social interaction
- resilience to hardship
- emotional resilience
- understand the difference between real risk and perceived risk
- positive risk taking
- employability skills

**Source: Australian Standard AS 2316.2.1:2025 Artificial climbing structures and challenge courses Part 2.1: Flying foxes and challenge ropes courses: Construction and safety requirements.*

Section 5: Statement Implementation Guidelines and Recommendations

This section offers implementation guidelines for (1) policymakers and government agencies, (2) schools and educational settings, (3) community and youth organisations, (4) parents and families, and (5) researchers. It also outlines ways in which we can protect children's and adolescents' time and opportunity to engage in risky play. Each is set out below.

5.1 Policymakers and Government Agencies

We invite policymakers to

1. consider using benefit–risk frameworks in playground standards, regulations, and community recreation spaces, replacing risk-elimination approaches and supporting providers in litigation with lack of reasonable grounds;
2. mandate the protection of unstructured risky play time in educational settings through minimum requirements;
3. fund research on risky play and its implementation support for schools and communities;
4. support professional development opportunities for staff, allied health professionals, and the wider community in risky play facilitation and benefit–risk assessment (BRA).

5.2 Schools and Educational Settings

We recommend that primary and secondary schools

1. develop primary or secondary (depending on context) comprehensive risky play policies utilising benefit–risk assessment (BRA) approaches;
2. audit and redesign spaces and resources to optimise opportunities for risk taking while eliminating hazards;
3. provide professional development for all staff in the value of risky play and the important role of staff in facilitating these opportunities;
4. engage children, adolescents, and families in understanding and supporting risky play through education;
5. protect play time from academic encroachment and ensure a balance between indoor and outdoor activities and supervised and free-range play;
6. recognise and acknowledge that primary schools and secondary schools may offer different opportunities for children and adolescents to engage in risky play;
7. strengthen and extend existing play infrastructure and supervised adventurous play opportunities in primary schools, ensuring that risk-averse practices do not unnecessarily restrict children's play opportunities;
8. intentionally redesign breaktime environments and routines to reintroduce opportunities for outdoor, adventurous, and developmentally rich play in secondary schools, countering the tendency of risk-averse cultures to limit play to sedentary or sport-specific activities. This is particularly crucial for supporting children and adolescents with disabilities or additional needs.

5.3 Communities and Youth Organisations

We support communities and youth organisations to

1. design public spaces incorporating natural features, indoor adventure modules, and graduated challenge pathways;
2. remove unnecessary restrictions and over sanitised signage from parks and playgrounds;
3. provide adventurous play and exergaming programs specifically designed for adolescent developmental needs;
4. ensure equitable access to risky play opportunities and spaces across all socioeconomic communities ensuring the diverse needs of all community members are met.

5.4 Parents and Families

We encourage parents and families to

1. consider extending physical, social, and digital boundaries to match children's growing competence;
2. resist immediate intervention in manageable challenges, allowing children and adolescents to navigate peer collaboration and minor setbacks;
3. advocate for risky play opportunities and independent mobility in schools and communities, ensuring that the benefits of risk are recognised;
4. model healthy risk taking, embodied joy, and constructive learning from mistakes;
5. explore appropriate resources to gain a deeper understanding of the developmental and neurobiological benefits of risky play.

5.5 Researchers

We call on researchers and funding bodies to

1. follow children longitudinally who engage in more risky play at earlier ages to ascertain whether they become better risk takers during adolescence, from age 13 onwards;
2. target research specifically focusing on the 9 to 12 and 13 to 15 age groups to capture pubertal transitions and shifting risk appetites;
3. investigate multi-interwoven risk dimensions, particularly prosocial risk taking, cognitive stances, and digital reputations;
4. evaluate implementation approaches, spatial affordances, and adult barrier reduction strategies;
5. develop practical, validated tools for benefit–risk assessment (BRA) across diverse micro-environments;
6. prioritise diverse voices, particularly those of children and adolescents from low socioeconomic, culturally diverse, and marginalised communities, to better understand how risky play is experienced, constrained, and negotiated across different social and environmental contexts;
7. appropriate investment from government and nongovernment sources in targeted, funded research on risky play.

Protecting Time for Child and Adolescent Risky Play

Last, research shows us that we need to be mindful that children and adolescents aged 9 to 15 experience significant time constraints that limit risky play opportunities (Gray, Dallat, & Jackson, 2025; Hyndman, 2025). Strategies to protect unstructured or risky play time are provided in Table 5.

Table 5: Protecting time for child and adolescent risky play

Setting	Recommendation
School settings	Minimum daily outdoor unstructured time requirements (60+ minutes recommended); resistance to indoor recess defaults (outdoor time except in severe weather); integration with the curriculum through outdoor learning approaches; lunchtime extension to accommodate adequate play; before- and after-school playground access; and reduction of structured programming during recess and break periods.
Family contexts	Daily outdoor time as a routine expectation; reduction of overscheduled activities; neighbourhood play networks among families; device-free time blocks; weekend adventures and outdoor time prioritisation; and modelling of outdoor activity and appropriate risk taking.
Community settings	Extended hours for park and playground access in all communities; after-school programming incorporating risky play; youth spaces designed to meet adolescent developmental needs; transportation solutions enabling access to natural areas; and reduction of participation barriers (fees, permits, restrictions) specifically through the lens of equity and inclusion.
At a policy level	Mandated minimum daily outdoor risky play time in educational settings; protection of recess and lunch breaks from academic encroachment; community planning prioritising accessible risky play spaces; youth development programs incorporating adventurous activities; and resistance to further restrictions on children's independent mobility.

Conclusion

Children and young adolescents aged 9 to 15 require opportunities for risky play to support healthy development. They are intrinsically hardwired for sensation seeking and risk taking as a way of developing and defining themselves. During this critical period of neurobiological maturation and pubertal onset, challenging play experiences across physical, social, emotional, cognitive and executive function, and digital dimensions build executive function, emotional regulation, social competence, and resilience essential for lifelong wellbeing. Risky play is not unsafe play. It is thoughtfully managed, developmentally appropriate challenge, offering substantial benefits through the preservation of manageable risks and elimination of serious hazards. Understanding the fundamental distinction between risk (opportunity) and hazard (danger) is essential for effective provision.

Contemporary research from neuroscience, developmental paediatrics, and play studies clearly demonstrates that the benefits of well-managed risky play substantially outweigh the risks. The evidence framework is robust, supported by systematic reviews, national injury trend analyses, and professional position statements. Significant barriers persist, including risk-averse institutional cultures, liability concerns, parental anxiety, and insufficient professional training. Overcoming these barriers requires fundamental shifts from risk elimination towards benefit–risk assessment (BRA), supported by policy change, environmental redesign, professional development, and community education.

In the context of escalating mental health challenges, declining physical activity, and increasing nature disconnection among 9- to 15-year-olds, risky play represents an accessible, evidence-based intervention supporting holistic development across multiple domains. We call on families, allied health professionals, educators, communities, and policymakers to champion risky play for children and young adolescents aged 9 to 15 years by adopting benefit–risk frameworks that balance safety with developmental necessity and acknowledge that "as safe as necessary" serves this target group infinitely better than "as safe as possible".

This risky play position statement was shaped by 14 discipline experts from education, allied health, litigation, and community sectors. Through a multidisciplinary collaborative process, the reference group offered extensive written and verbal feedback throughout the six-month process. What you have now read is a collective team effort resulting in Australia's landmark Position Statement on Risky Play for 9-15 yr olds.

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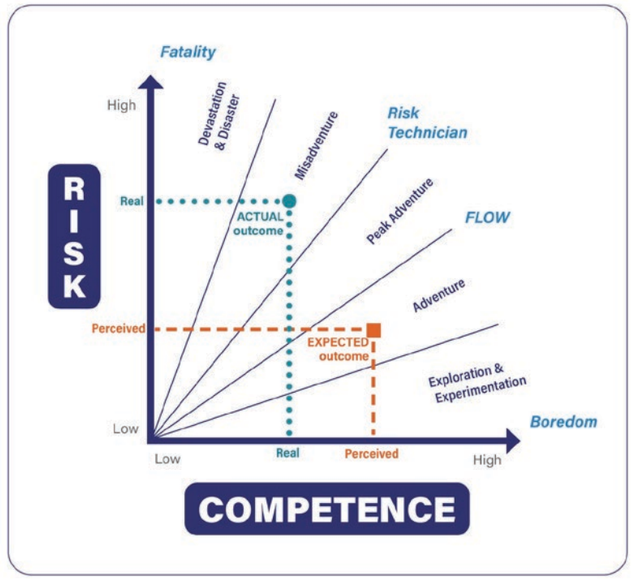
Appendix A: Factsheet

Practice-Based Examples for the Adventure Experience Paradigm



The 'Adventure Experience Paradigm' developed by Simon Priest and Michael Gass (1997/2018) is a risk/competency paradigm. It offers a representation of how individuals move through different zones, Exploration, Adventure, Peak Adventure, Misadventure, and Disaster. These zones are based on the dynamic interaction between real and perceived levels of risk and a person's level of competence.

The framework highlights that adventure is not a fixed or universal state but a highly subjective experience, shaped by each person's history, confidence, social interactions, guidance, emotional state, and interpretation of the environment. Importantly, two people can be in the same situation yet occupy entirely different zones within the paradigm, because their perceptions of and engagement with risk, uncertainty and danger differ.

While the paradigm itself provides a conceptual map there is a need for current and practical examples from practitioners, and adolescents. Our intention in offering these examples is to help illustrate how the five zones may be operationalised in real-world settings. These examples do not define the paradigm; rather, they bring it to life, offering concrete scenarios that help practitioners recognise where an individual might be operating and how to support safe, meaningful, and growth-oriented adventure experiences.

The practical examples provided below are statements from practitioners and adolescents to explain how they understand the different zones in their own context. The table also includes some potential strategies to unpack the role of the practitioner.

EXPLORATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

Example from Practitioner

- When rock jumping into a creek, a group of adolescent boys were experimenting with the depth of the creek and the level of splash they could make jumping in in different positions including their different body shapes and level of above the tree that they were jumping in.

Example from Adolescent

- I'm seeing how high I can climb before I feel scared.
- I'm learning how close I can get to the fire and feel safe.
- I am walking up to the local shops with my friend. We know how to cross these roads safely as we have crossed them many times. We know safe houses we can go to along the way if something goes wrong. I know what time I need to be home.
- I am swinging from a rope into a river. At first, I check the depth of the water with my parents and talk about how the depth changes with the tide. When I know the water is deep enough, I spent the next few hours swinging into the river with my friends.

The role of the Practitioner

- Very little but to observe at a distance and assess against risk benefit including knowing that young person and their skills and capabilities.
- A playworker sets up the space for young people to explore manageable risks. Children test their balance on low structures, experiment with lighting a small cooking fire under supervision, build dams using water sand and rocks
- Create an environment rich in possibilities and manageable risk. Observe closely, build relationships, model safe practices when needed, and provide access to materials, tools, fire, water, loose parts, and physical challenges. Support young people to test boundaries, make discoveries, and assess their own capabilities without unnecessary intervention

ADVENTURE

Example from Practitioner

- Young person walking home by themselves for the first time. Child has explored and experimented and then undertakes the adventure.
- Acknowledging that challenge has been undertaken that is manageable but has a margin for error.
- A practitioner supports a young person to climb higher than they have before, ride a billycart faster, help manage a campfire, or take responsibility for a construction project that might fail. The challenge matches the young person's developing skills

Example from Adolescent

- The trill of completing something not previously allowed and doing so successful gives a lot of adrenaline.
- Engaged in acceptable challenge. I control.
- I'm nervous climbing this high, but I think I can do it. This billycart is going much faster than before, but I feel in control.
- I am riding my bike with a group of friends to the local pump track. We have been there with our parents many times. On this occasion, our parents are dropping us off to the pump track and then picking us up in 2 hours. I know I have to stay at the pump track and to call my parents if anything goes wrong.
- I have been swinging into the river off a rope tied to a tree for several months most weekends! I usually swing from the riverbank. I see that there is an opportunity to make it more thrilling by building a platform from the three. This makes the jumper higher! I check the depths first and continue swinging.

The role of the Practitioner

- Supporting the learning as needed, supporting the parents / adults to allow it if limiting child's development and celebrating with the child.
- Dynamic Benefit-Risk Assessment. Potential supportive intervention (to allow play to continue).
- Encourage young people to extend beyond their comfort zone while maintaining an appropriate challenge level. Offer guidance, ask reflective questions, help them assess risks, and provide reassurance when needed. The practitioner remains present but avoids taking over or influencing of the challenge.
- Be available if needed if something goes wrong on the independent adventure.
- Respond supportively when things do not go to plan.

PEAK ADVENTURE

Example from Practitioner	Example from Adolescent	The role of the Practitioner
• Acknowledging that challenge has been undertaken that is manageable but has a larger margin for error. • Ebike usage in our area. • The playworker steps back as a capable risk competent adolescent takes on a significant challenge–climbing to the highest point they have safely assessed and practiced, nailing the double front flip on the trampoline or building a bonfire with their friends	• This is the highest I've ever climbed. • That's the first time I have nailed that double flip! • Everyone is relying on me to keep this fire going. • I could fail in front of my friends, but I'm going to try anyway. • I am riding my e-bike fast, in an area I was not really supposed to be in with my friends. • My friends and I have found a new dirt bike track. We have not gone on the track before, so we are keen to experiment where it takes us. I told my parents where we are going but the unknown of the track makes this exciting!	• Remind young people of the law and the implications noting that the young person's experience of peak adventure could be categories as misadventure for many of the adults present. • Dynamic Benefit-Risk Assessment. Potential supportive intervention (to allow play to continue and or reduce hazards but leaving manageable risks). • Trust the competence of the young person. The practitioner monitors from a distance, ensuring serious hazards are managed while allowing the adolescent to experience autonomy, responsibility, uncertainty, and achievement. Opportunities for confidence, resilience, and identity may emerge.

MISADVENTURE

Example from Practitioner	Example from Adolescent	The role of the Practitioner
• Young person on the roof of a community centre • A young person (often entering the space for first time) overestimates their competence. They jump from a height they are not ready for and sprain an ankle, ride a billycart too fast and crash, get too close to a fire after finding/ throwing accelerate on the flames and receive a minor burn and singed hair	• I was so excited to scale the roof of the community centre, however, when i did, my foot went through the old roof. I got down safely, and as a consequence I had to help mend the roof. • I thought I was ready to jump from there. • I was trying to impress my mates and threw the 2-stroke petrol on the fire. • I am on a ride with my friends and my mate got hurt. Our phones ran out of battery and there are only two of us. He can't ride home. I decided to ask another group who rode past to use their phone and they helped.	• Provide and ensure natural consequences are carried out not to speak only of what happened but provide a physical correlation from one action to another. • Respond supportively when things do not go to plan. Provide first aid if required, help the young person process what happened, encourage reflection, and support learning without blame. The focus is on transforming mistakes, minor injuries, conflicts etc into opportunities for growth development

DISASTER

Example from Practitioner

- A serious breakdown occurs where risks are no longer proportionate or manageable. e.g. access to an uncontrolled fire source, an unassessed structural collapse, a near drowning incident, or severe injury from an unmanaged jump and fall from a great height

Example from Adolescent

- The consequences were much bigger than I expected. My mate was seriously hurt and everything changed forever.

The role of the Practitioner

- Supporting young people to take social risks and to be able to stand confidently in facing risks that they are fearful or including the confidence to say no. Helping young people to see outside their circle and support young people to look long term which is quite tricky at this developmental age.
- Intervene immediately. The practitioner's responsibility shifts from facilitating risk to managing emergency response, preventing further harm, coordinating support, and reviewing systems and environments to understand what contributed to the incident. Learning remains important but secondary to safety/care. Engage perhaps: Ambulance, Hospital, police, fire dept, health services emergency services etc. or provide wrap around and trauma informed care and supports.

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