



Risk and Play Policy

National Quality Standards Quality Area 1-5

United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child

National Framework for School Aged Care: My Time, Our Place

FOOSHC Philosophy

Statement

This Policy sets out Forrest Out Of School Hours Care's (FOOSHC) understanding of play and risk and confirms its commitment to ensuring that quality play environments and opportunities for risk taking are available to all children. FOOSHC aims to be risk aware versus risk averse. This policy has been developed to provide a coherent, consistent and balanced approach to the management and facilitation of risk and play at FOOSHC. It aims to be a practical working tool that guides educators in their practice when making decisions about play and risk.

FOOSHC acknowledges that whilst playing children may have accidents, get dirty, wet or upset, we have a responsibility to ensure that any potential risk needs to be balanced with benefits. To this end we will do our best to avoid children coming to serious physical or emotional harm by carefully managing all play and risk experiences facilitated at the service.

FOOSHC complies with the requirements of the *National Quality Framework*; the ideas and concepts explored throughout the *Framework for School Age Care; My Time, Our Place*. The relevant regulation 168 does not identify the specific need for a policy on risk however FOOSHC deems it necessary as risk assessment is required in several key aspects of service delivery and we are committed to providing and facilitating risk taking in children's play.

In addition to this FOOSHC has a vision that each child can fully enjoy their right to play throughout their childhood as set out in Article 31 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child* and FOOSHC endorses *The Playwork Principles, Managing Risk In Play Provision: A Position Statement* and *Managing Risk In Play Provision: An implementation guide*.

Professional Development

We believe that it is adult's attitudes towards, and understanding of, children's play and risk taking that has the most significant impact on the quality of these experiences. As part of this policy it is the responsibility of FOOSHC to provide external professional development and internal professional development, facilitated by the service Educational Leader, to all its educators on play and risk and all relative procedures to ensure we are able to adequately support the facilitation of children's play and risk taking.

Consultation with Children

It is a requirement of this policy that children should be involved in the development of Benefit Risk Assessments and Dynamic Benefit Risk assessments. It is the responsibility of all educators to ensure continuous conversations are had with children regarding risk and our policy and procedures.

Play

In the overstimulated, busy and chaotic world in which children have been exposed to in recent times FOOSHC believes in advocating for the value of play and the importance it has in children's lives. There has, over recent times, been a worldwide concern for children's safety in general community environments. This has had an effect on the amount of space available for play and the time in which children are able to play. It is our role to provide and facilitate those opportunities that are no longer readily available.

Play is difficult to define. As Sutton-Smith notes, "we all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity," (2001, 1). Something that we can say with confidence about play, however, is that it is central to children's lives. Play is fundamental to children's happiness, physical, psychological and social well-being. Play is a very significant way in which children come to understand



themselves and the world around them. Play allows children to ascribe meaning and value to the world they co-construct. Through play children explore the physical and social environment, ideas and concepts, and learn how to deal with situations; in this they learn what cannot simply be taught.

The benefits of play are countless. Play assists in developing coordination, balance, strength, stamina and fine and gross motor skills; it also aids in establishing a habit of exercise. The development of confidence, resilience, recognition of emotions and the ability to regulate those emotions and respond to others are all examples of how play can enhance a child's emotional development. Play naturally gives rise to situations which exercise problem solving, decision making, communication and negotiation skills. It gives children the opportunity to be autonomous thinkers, allows for independence and the chance to take risks and make their own judgements. It allows for children to come to terms with and work through anxiety and negativity. It is a primary mechanism through which children make friends and build relationships with the significant people in their lives. It is a mechanism through which, by participating in make-believe scenarios and adopting different roles, children can explore their social position in the world.

It is important to note, however, that viewing play primarily in terms of its extrinsic benefits results in losing sight of the true essence of play. Children do not play in order to develop their gross motor skills – they play simply because they are driven to do so. Children derive pleasure and enjoyment of life from play. It is valuable not solely in terms of the adult that will develop decades down the track, but in terms of the child that is present at that moment. *'Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons'* (Playwork Principles 2005).

A crucial factor in enriching their experience and enhancing their development is that children are in control of their own play. Play provision will be based on the principle of empowering children and increasing their choices. Children's play belongs to children and adults must consider this carefully when looking at our own program and planning and the impact of our own adult agendas. There is no right or wrong way to play. Play may involve the use of equipment or not; it may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative; be done with other people or on one's own; be light hearted or very serious. We recognise that playing away from adult's presence is also important as it allows children to explore the world in their own terms and create their own identities. In *A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types* Hughes identifies many a play type. These include rough and tumble play and recapitulative play. Playing allows children to overcome cultural boundaries, explore current cultural trends, events and concepts that may plague them.

Children's playful disposition permeates every aspect of their life worlds, where they continuously create disequilibrium, disorder, uncertainty and opportunities for 'as if' (make believe) behaviours. The wide reaching potential benefits of this playful disposition accrue from a unique set of design features: unpredictability, spontaneity, goallessness, pretence and personal control and it is these irregularities that occur in play which foster adaptability. Removing these irregularities by attempting to predict and place controls on playful behaviour risks creating sterile, predictable and ultimately ineffective play spaces that limit the potential of children's play, learning and development. We must be careful that our adult desires for order, clearly defined outputs and safety, although well meaning, don't restrict children's need for disorder, uncertainty and challenge (Tawil 2015)

We recognise that these play opportunities are a vital component of each child's day and that we do not have the right to structure them due to factors such as bad weather. The FOOSHC philosophy makes clear that children will have the opportunity to explore both the indoor and outdoor environments regardless of weather. In this example play will be facilitated through the provision of wet weather equipment.

Even the most influential child development theorists of the 20th century recognised the importance of play in children's development. It is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development that supports the idea that children should be provided with opportunities for risk taking and play that keeps them at the edge of their capabilities. We at FOOSHC believe that play and risk rank alongside formal education in terms of the opportunity it provides children to engage positively with the complexity of the world around them.



Risk

In the course of play, it is to be expected that children will place themselves in risky situations. FOOSHC has a duty of care to ensure that the children in our care are reasonably protected from the risks involved. In the OSHC industry, and the wider community, this is often interpreted to mean that everything possible must be done to remove or minimise risk. This approach may lead to overprotecting children – ‘wrapping them up in cotton wool’. However what many fail to appreciate is that risk has benefits too.

It is an important part of child development to be given the opportunity to take acceptable risks. Risk compels children to push against the boundaries of their own capabilities in environments that are challenging and stimulating. Without these opportunities children are not offered the experiences to develop the necessary physical, emotional and social skills to deal with the wider, unsupervised, world.

If children are not offered challenging, risky experiences in settings such as out of school hour’s services, it is reasonable to be concerned those children will seek challenge and stimulation elsewhere and that these may include unacceptable levels of risk. A contextual example of this is building fires. If we do not offer experiences to engage with the properties and responsibilities of fire there is a high chance children will do so elsewhere possibly in an environment that is not supportive of their wellbeing.

Children naturally seek out risk in the course of play: *‘children need and want to take risks when they play,’* (Managing Play Provision). Ben Tawil discusses the idea that children create their own uncertainty in their play to seek out a feeling of being *‘in control’* of being *‘out of control’* as opposed to actually *‘being out of control’*. Play is a mechanism through which children can expose themselves to measured doses of risk. Of course, the children themselves are often the best judges of how large a dose is acceptable. If educators step in to ‘fix’ everything all the time we are robbing children of the opportunity to develop essential life skills they require later in life to deal with moments and events that do indeed make one feel as though their life is out of control. When we discuss risk we are referring to the moments and opportunities that create uncertainty and unpredictability and potential hazards as parts of children’s play. Serious harm refers to death, permanent injury or experiencing severe long term mental trauma. It is our responsibility to maintain our Duty of Care by striking a balance between the child’s need to take risks and to ensure they are not exposed to significant harm.

‘...Exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competences’ (Managing Risk In Play Provision: A Position Statement)

Risk taking supports children to develop responsibility for themselves and others, consider the consequences of their actions and will support them to take on challenges and accept responsibility. Through taking risks children build their capabilities, explore their emotions and test boundaries. They gain a practical experience in taking responsibility for their own safety. Participation in risky activities sometimes results in failure. It can be beneficial for children to experience failure, so that they learn to deal with it with resilience.

Risk benefit approach

It is FOOSHC’s policy to adopt a risk-benefit approach to play provision. We aim to adopt an attitude that is ‘risk-aware’ rather than ‘risk averse’.

Each play situation will be different. A policy document such as this cannot set down hard-and-fast rules for this variety of possibilities. Furthermore, circumstances may change over time. Children move from one experience to another. Over time an experience that was previously deemed acceptable may change and an educator may need to sensitively intervene to redirect, adapt the experience or again deem it acceptable following the below processes. As such, a risk-benefit approach to play provision requires dynamic, on-the-spot decision-making by educators that is sensitive to the nuances of the situation such as the capacity of the children involved, the context, etc. FOOSHC recognises that each individual’s perception of what is acceptable varies vastly and also the importance of reducing the impact of adult agendas on play. For these reasons dynamic risk-benefit assessment is a collaborative process. Before making a decision, educators must have discussions with their colleagues and, most importantly, with the children concerned. This ensures as much as possible that multiple perspectives are considered and no particular educator’s bias has impact. It also has the benefit of being respectful to children by including them in decisions that impact them. Depending on the level of risk involved a member of the director team should also be consulted.

It is often assumed that common words such as play and risk carry the same meaning for all and yet we know this is not the case, whether this is adults or children. It is because of this that we stress the importance of getting



to know the children. We must gain an understanding of their capabilities and facilitate risky play accordingly. That is not to say that children will be prohibited from engaging in these experiences merely that this needs to be considered and conversations had between the child and the team. The flow chart below provides the framework for working through these scenarios.

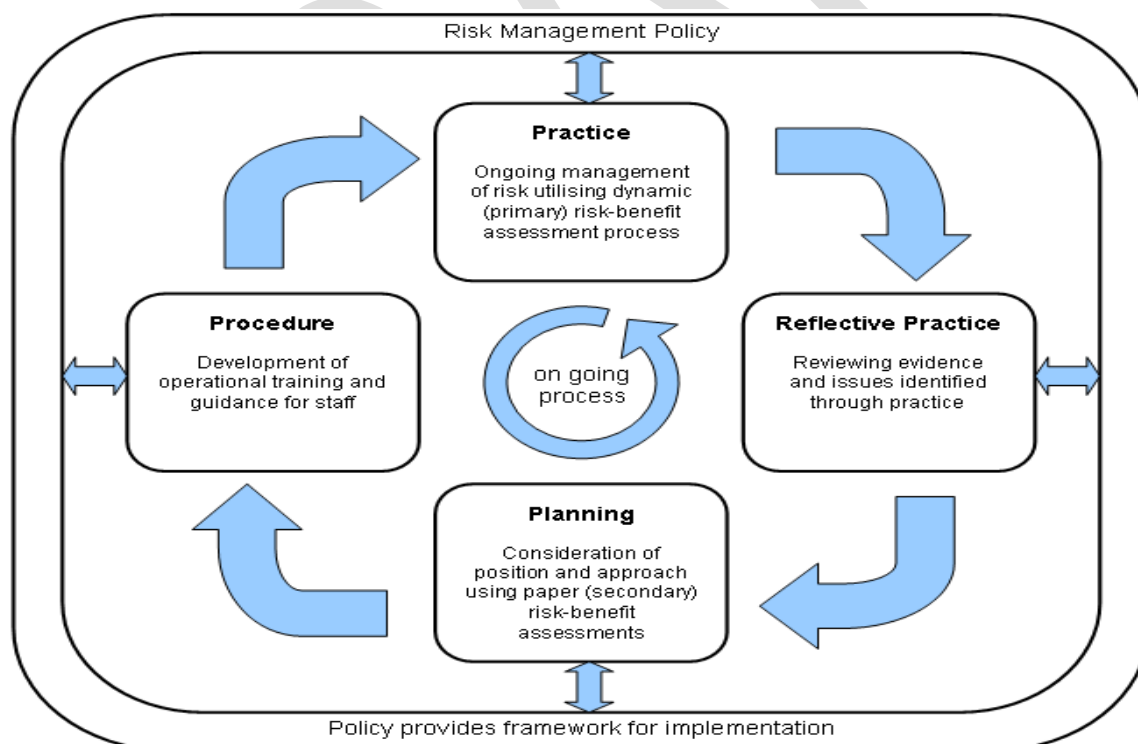
In considering a risk benefit approach one must also consider not only the capabilities of the children but their behaviour. What contributions are children making to ensure their own safety? Have they engaged in the development of a Benefit Risk Assessment? Have they negotiated rules among themselves?

Most people are used to doing all they can to minimise or even remove risk in all that they do. This however can have grave consequences when considering child development. Risk is quite often a key component to many activities that are accepted on a daily basis as acceptable – take a game of rugby for example. The chance that an injury will occur to at least one player if not more in a match are almost certain however the risks are considered an acceptable part of the game and worth taking. The risks cannot be removed without completely altering the game, they make the game challenging and exciting and help players to develop and improve. In a similar way risk needs to be present in children's play to give them similar benefits of development and achievement yet is often not considered acceptable. The risk benefit approach looks to facilitate children's risk taking by considering what risks there are and what, if any, benefits can be gained by engaging with these potential risks. A risk benefit approach considers three factors when determining if a level of risk is acceptable: the likelihood of coming to harm, the severity of that harm and the benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity

This approach is formalised at FOOSHC in the process of Benefit Risk Assessment or Dynamic Benefit Risk Assessment. These are completed by educators and children using judgement based on their understanding and knowledge of this policy, our service philosophy and the children involved.

Cycle and flow chart for Risk Assessment

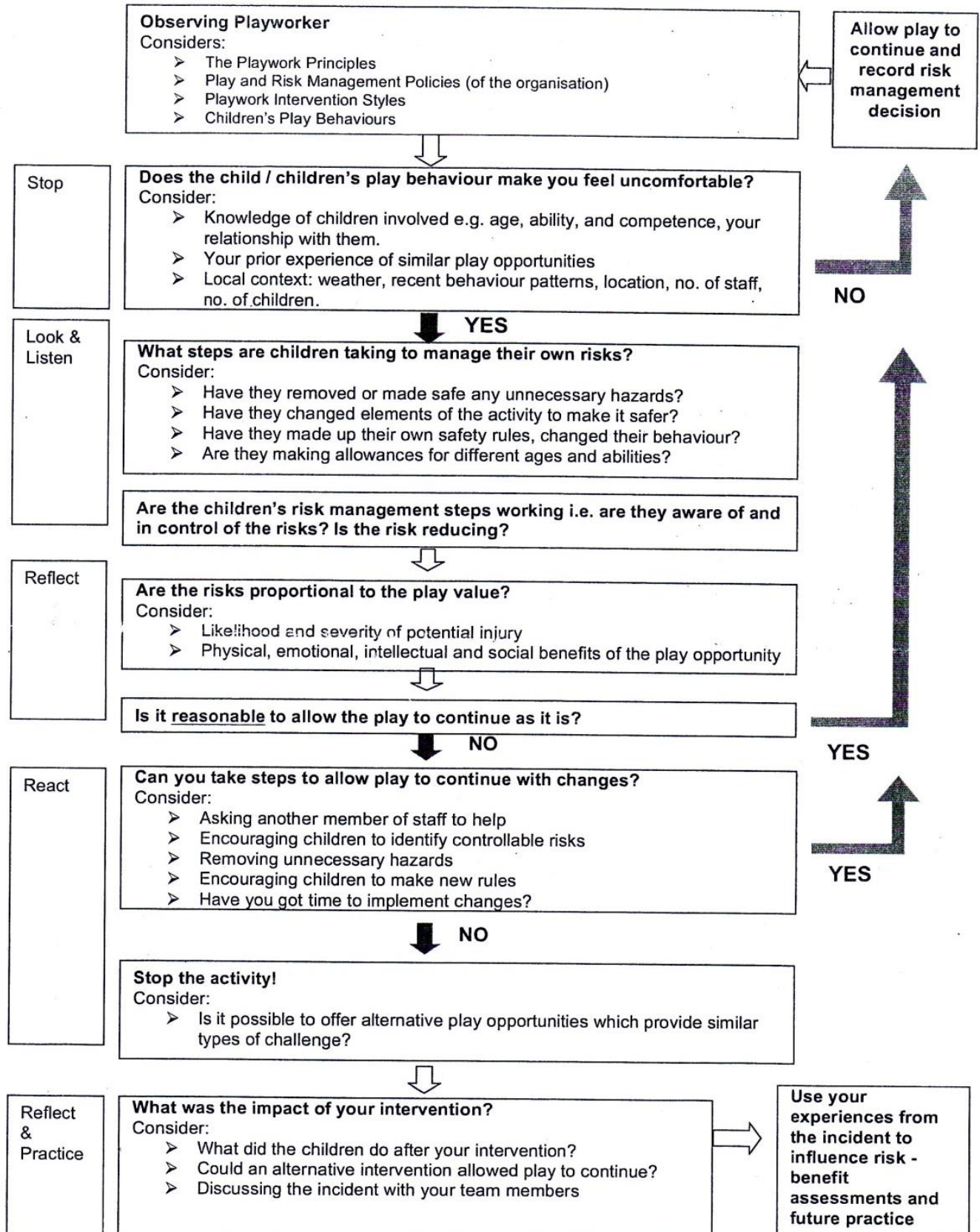
Below is the risk management cycle FOOSHC will follow as a framework for implementation. The flow chart guides our practice step by step when making decisions regarding risk and play in our environment.



Barclay, M. Davies, M. Dessington, M. Driffield, R. King-Sheard, M. & Tawil, B. (2010),



DYNAMIC RISK-BENEFIT ASSESSMENT CYCLE





Playwork Principles

In the United Kingdom, 'Playworker's' are employed by the government to provide play opportunities in settings such as OSHCs and 'adventure playgrounds'. The following principles, which make up the Playworker's' core philosophy, are also a useful guide for FOOSHC educators. Our role as an educator in upholding these principles is to create an environment rich in possibility to facilitate children's play not unnecessarily interfering or leading children's play but rather recognising the children's play cues and being an available loose part.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All Playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children

Written by Kylie Keane February 2016 (Contributions and edit assistance Lewis Rosenberg)

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