

Risk Management in Play

Introduction

All Playworkers must adhere to the Health and Safety Policy, a copy of which can be found in our policy booklet. This policy relates to the play opportunities provided within Ysgol Llandrillo yn Rhos Daycare. This guidance is based upon recommendations from both *'Managing risks in Play Provision: A Policy Statement'* (Play Safety Forum, 2002) and *'Managing risks in Play Provision: An Implementation guide'* (Play England, 2008).

Statement of Intent

Ysgol Llandrillo yn Rhos Daycare will strive to provide and maintain a protective environment for all employees, service users and visitors to the setting. However, we also recognise the critical development benefits that children gain by being enabled to experience a degree of risk and challenge in their play, therefore, Playworkers should aim to balance the need for safety with the need to allow children to learn how to manage their own risks. This statement is reinforced by

- 1, The Welsh Assembly Government's Play Policy (2002)
- 2, Conwy's CYPP Play Strategy (2010-13)
- 3, Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Position Statement (Play Safety Forum, 2002)
- 4, HSE Statement (2012)

Risk in Children's Play

Ysgol Llandrillo yn Rhos recognises that all children both need and want to take risks in order to explore their own limitations, venture into new experiences and develop their capabilities. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. We are uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose, and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world.

Risk taking is a normal part of children's play and, therefore, not allowing children to experience risk is to not allow them to play.

It is important to note that a child's perception on what risky play is varies from child to child. For example some children may find the emotional risk of dressing up or taking part in a role play is too risky, for others the physical risk of climbing to the top of a climbing frame is too risky. The term risky play is not the same as dangerous play. Risky play is any play opportunity which allows the child to feel uncertain or to overcome a personal challenge. Sometimes risky play *is* dangerous. In these situations Playworkers will need to work with the child involved to determine if the play activity is appropriate for the setting. If a child or Playworker is seriously injured during this session then we have legal duties under RIDDOR that requires them to report and record work related accidents by the quickest means possible.

Risk Management

Risk - Benefit Assessment

"Risk-benefit assessment considers the benefits to children as well as the risks" (Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide, Play England, 2008)

In all human activity, there is an element of risk. It is a Playworker's role to assess and manage the level of risks within the setting, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, and test and develop their own abilities without being exposed to unacceptable risks of serious injury. By providing controlled opportunities for children to encounter and

manage risks we are enabling them to have the chance to develop their own risk assessing skills (which they can use when adults are not around).

Judgements about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and risk management crucially involve making judgements about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance between risks and benefits. Social and psychological factors are also important in risk assessment. Risks that are acceptable in one community may be unacceptable in another.

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm. In many cases the existence of hazards can be justified, perhaps because they are impossible to remove or perhaps because their removal would have undesirable consequences or be too costly. Where the existence of a hazard can be justified, measures should be in place to manage it. Playworkers working in the setting will make informed judgements about the hazards to which children are exposed and they will take steps to ensure that risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.

We at Ysgol Llandrillo Yn Rhos Daycare are currently changing our risk assessments to risk benefit assessments, we have adapted to this way to ensure the children are benefitting from challenging play.

Three factors are contained in the Risk Assessment Form, these are the:

- likelihood of injury
- severity of the potential injury
- benefits, rewards or outcomes of the play activity to the individual child i.e. the 'play value' of the experience.

Dynamic Risk Assessment

Playworkers are trained to facilitate risky play and choose an intervention style that balances safety with the developmental benefits of allowing children to continue their play. By its nature, children's play can be chaotic and unpredictable and can change direction suddenly. For this reason paper risk assessment forms alone cannot fully support Playworkers to assess all the risks that may occur in any one play session. When facilitating a flexible play environment, Playworkers need to constantly assess the risks they see before them and base their interventions on their prior experience and knowledge of the children involved.

This process is known as *dynamic* risk assessment. When performing dynamic risk assessments, Playworkers should observe the play activity and decide if it can continue as it is or if it can continue with changes or if it should be stopped altogether (fig 2). If an activity occurs more than once, is unusual or has the potential for injury, this thought process should be evidenced by being written up at the end of the play session.

Operational Framework

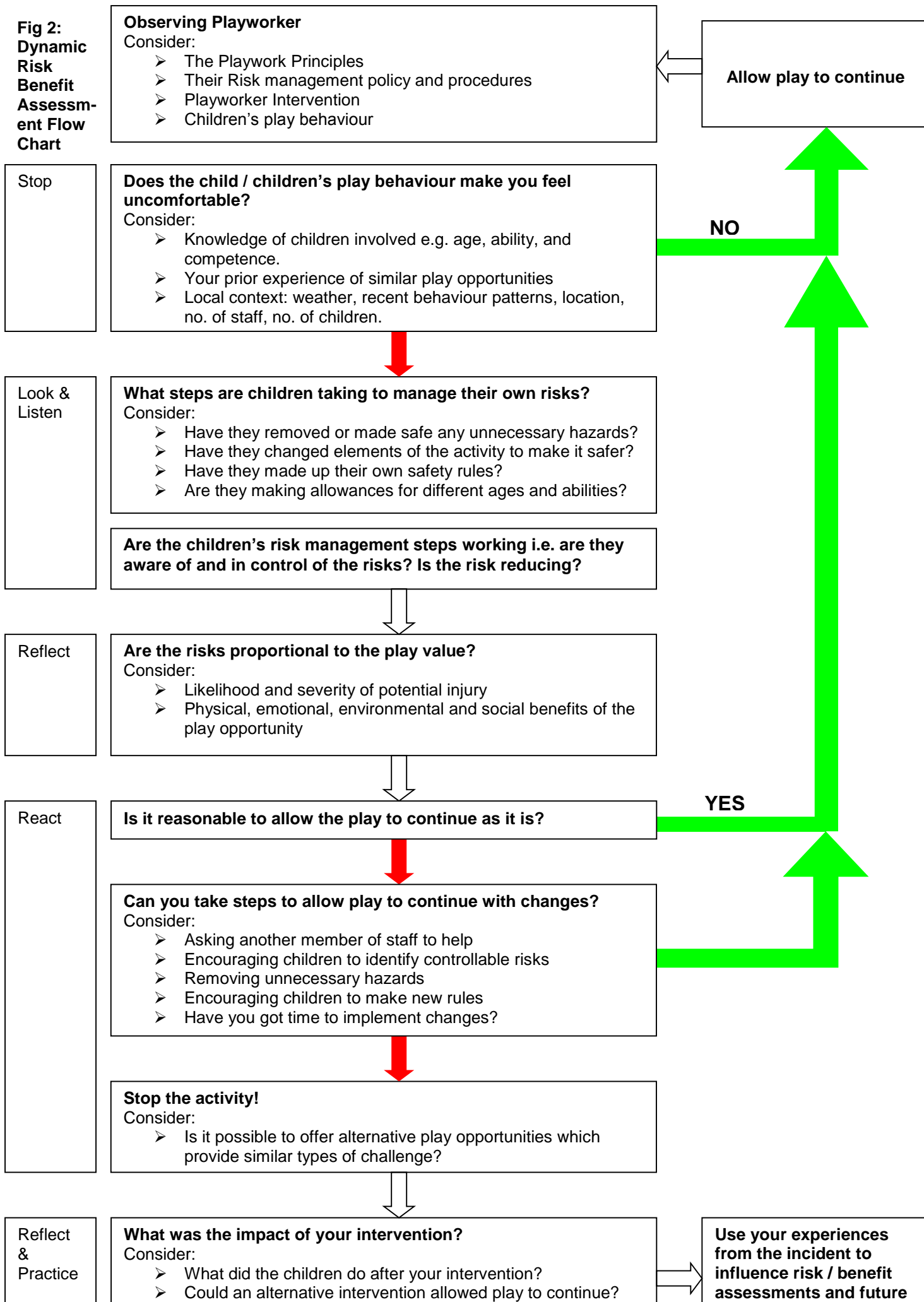
- Prior to the provision commencing the Person in charge and registered person will complete risk assessment forms for the most common play opportunities and hazards as well as the Senior Playworkers completing individual site assessments. These completed forms will be explained during Playwork inductions.
- It is the responsibility of individual Playworkers to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge of what is contained within the risk assessment form that has been completed for the play setting that they are working in.
- The Senior Playworker on site is responsible for completing daily checks in the setting. This includes removing any potentially dangerous hazards, or putting controls in place to manage the risk associated with them.
- During the operating hours all Playworkers should be vigilant of health and safety issues and should take appropriate action if necessary. When hazards are identified, any actions taken must be recorded.

- During the session, Playworkers will be expected to dynamically risk assess all play activities which children engage in.
- Judgments about whether or not to let children engage in a risky activity should be based on the Playworker's previous experience and knowledge of the child and take into consideration the likelihood of injury occurring, the potential severity of that injury and benefits to the child of experiencing that particular play activity.
- If Playworkers identify a play activity where they do not feel comfortable with the level of risk involved they should, whenever possible attempt to take action and put controls in place which will allow the play activity to continue but reduce the risk to a more acceptable level, rather than removing the play opportunity altogether.
- **If in doubt the Playworker should stop the play activity and review the situation with their Senior Playworker or the Person in charge at the next possible opportunity.**
- Playworkers should keep in mind the fact that they must be able to justify any controls they have put in place or why they have allowed the play activity to continue based on their understanding of how children benefit from being involved in risky play behaviour.
- If a Playworker has to take any action due to health and safety concerns they must discuss the actions taken with the rest of their Playwork team at the end of the session or at the next available opportunity. Playwork teams must then come up with an agreed set of controls should the situation occur again and then add this to that setting's risk assessment form. Senior Playworkers should inform the Person in charge of any additions or alternations made to this form.

Playwork Training

Ysgol Llandrillo yn Rhos daycare will ensure that all Playworkers are trained in how to use the above operational framework prior to working in the setting. This will include ensuring that Playworkers have an understanding of the importance of allowing children to experience risk and challenge in play and how to balance this with the need to ensure children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of serious injury.

**Fig 2:
Dynamic
Risk
Benefit
Assessm-
ent Flow
Chart**



Observing Playworker
Consider:

- The Playwork Principles
- Their Risk management policy and procedures
- Playworker Intervention
- Children's play behaviour

Allow play to continue

Stop

Does the child / children's play behaviour make you feel uncomfortable?
Consider:

- Knowledge of children involved e.g. age, ability, and competence.
- Your prior experience of similar play opportunities
- Local context: weather, recent behaviour patterns, location, no. of staff, no. of children.

NO

Look & Listen

What steps are children taking to manage their own risks?
Consider:

- Have they removed or made safe any unnecessary hazards?
- Have they changed elements of the activity to make it safer?
- Have they made up their own safety rules?
- Are they making allowances for different ages and abilities?

Are the children's risk management steps working i.e. are they aware of and in control of the risks? Is the risk reducing?

Reflect

Are the risks proportional to the play value?
Consider:

- Likelihood and severity of potential injury
- Physical, emotional, environmental and social benefits of the play opportunity

React

Is it reasonable to allow the play to continue as it is?

YES

Can you take steps to allow play to continue with changes?
Consider:

- Asking another member of staff to help
- Encouraging children to identify controllable risks
- Removing unnecessary hazards
- Encouraging children to make new rules
- Have you got time to implement changes?

Stop the activity!
Consider:

- Is it possible to offer alternative play opportunities which provide similar types of challenge?

Reflect & Practice

What was the impact of your intervention?
Consider:

- What did the children do after your intervention?
- Could an alternative intervention allowed play to continue?

Use your experiences from the incident to influence risk / benefit assessments and future

