

Playing with Risk: Exploring adult supported adventurous play

OVERVIEW

Playing with Risk is an introductory online course that invites educators to rethink how risk shows up in children's and young people's play, and in adult decision-making.

Rather than framing risk as something to eliminate, the course explores why children and young people are drawn to challenge, uncertainty and testing their limits, and what this means for wellbeing, learning and development. Educators are supported to clarify the difference between risk and hazard, and to reflect on how adult beliefs, fears and systems shape opportunities for adventurous play.

This course introduces shared language and foundational thinking around risky play, also known as adult-supported adventurous play. It is designed as a stand-alone introduction, while also supporting further exploration through extended professional learning where practice can be unpacked in greater depth.

The learning is reflective rather than prescriptive, supporting educators to build confidence, clarity and professional judgement when engaging in conversations about risk and play.

WE WILL...

- explore how social and cultural shifts have shaped adult perceptions of risk, and how these influence children's and young people's play, agency and confidence
- develop a clear understanding of adventurous and risky play, including the types of challenge children and young people seek and how educators can support this safely and responsibly
- clarify the difference between risk and hazard, strengthening confidence in identifying and responding to each in everyday practice
- examine legislation, regulatory expectations and common misconceptions related to risky play across early learning and school-aged care settings
- explore risk-benefit analysis as a collaborative practice, including meaningful ways to document decision-making and incorporate children's perspectives
- reflect on the language adults use during adventurous play, focusing on autonomy-supportive, confidence-building communication
- begin intentionally planning for adult-supported adventurous play within your service, considering culture, environment, team confidence and philosophy



DELIVERY MODE OFFERINGS:

1. Self-paced online course
2. Face-to-face workshops (2-3 hours)
3. Online webinar (1 -2 hours)

Contact us to book your workshop [HERE](#).

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PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, participants will possess:

1. Foundational understanding of why adventurous and risky play matters for holistic wellbeing and development
2. A clear understanding of the 8 recognised categories of risky and adventurous play, and how these may appear in children's behaviour
3. Confidence in distinguishing between a risk and a hazard and making sound, professionally informed decisions in practice.
4. Practical understanding on risk benefit analysis including how to incorporate children's ideas and perspectives into the documentation
5. Strategies for supporting children to safely engage in adventurous play using problem solving language to build judgement, confidence and risk literacy

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Evolutionary Play Theory Peter Gray

Psychologist Peter Gray describes children's natural drive to seek challenge, uncertainty and emotional intensity through play. From this perspective, adventurous play supports resilience, self-regulation and coping skills, with freely chosen challenge playing a key role in healthy development.

Risky Play Theory – Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter

Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter identifies common forms of risky play that reflect children's curiosity and competence, including engagement with height, speed, tools, uncertainty and physical challenge. These experiences are positioned as developmentally meaningful and expected aspects of childhood.

Risk–Benefit Perspective on Outdoor Play Mariana Brussoni

Research led by Mariana Brussoni emphasises weighing both the risks and benefits of children's play when making safety decisions. Her work highlights that overly restrictive approaches can limit experiences that support physical confidence, emotional wellbeing and social competence.

Adventurous Play and Anxiety Reduction Model Dodd & Lester

Dodd and Lester's model positions child-led adventurous play as a protective factor for mental health. By engaging in manageable uncertainty, challenge and physiological arousal within play, children have opportunities to develop emotional literacy, confidence and adaptive coping strategies over time.

Alignment with National Quality Standard

- QA1 – Educational Program and Practice (Elements 1.1.3, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3) – Supports intentional practice that responds to children's play, promotes agency and extends learning opportunities.
- QA2 – Children's Health and Safety (Elements 2.1.3, 2.2.1) – Supports children's physical activity, emotional wellbeing and safety through appropriate supervision and risk management.
- QA5 – Relationships with Children (Elements 5.1, 5.1.1) – Strengthens relational safety, positive guidance and respectful, meaningful interactions.

Alignment with EYLF v2.0

Principles:

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships: Builds trust through guidance, problem-solving and risk-supportive interactions.
- Equity, inclusion and high expectations: Positions risky play as individual and inclusive, recognising all children as capable learners

Practices:

- Holistic approaches: Recognises risky play as supporting children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive wellbeing.
- Responsiveness to children: Responds to self-initiated risk-taking with attuned guidance that supports agency and confidence.
- Play-based learning and intentionality: Positions adventurous play as meaningful learning supported by intentional educator decisions.

Learning Outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity: Risky play supports autonomy, resilience and a growing sense of agency.
- Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing: Risky play supports physical and mental wellbeing through challenge, choice and coping with uncertainty.
- Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners: Risky play builds persistence, creativity, problem-solving and engagement in learning.

Alignment with MTOP v2.0

Principles:

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships: Supports trust, confidence and emotional safety through attuned responses to risky play.
- Equity, inclusion and high expectations: Positions all children and young people as capable, supporting equitable access to challenge.
- Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning: Encourages educators to reflect on beliefs and assumptions about risk as part of professional growth.

Practices:

- Holistic, integrated and interconnected approaches: Frames risky play as supporting physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.
- Collaboration with children and young people: Recognises children and young people as active participants in assessing and navigating challenge.
- Play, leisure and intentionality: Positions risky play as meaningful leisure supported by intentional adult decision-making.

Outcome:

- Outcome 1: Children and young people have a strong sense of identity: Risky play supports autonomy, resilience and a growing sense of agency.
- Outcome 3: Children and young people have a strong sense of wellbeing: Risky play supports physical confidence and emotional wellbeing through challenge and movement.
- Outcome 4: Children and young people are confident and involved learners: Appropriate challenge encourages exploration, persistence and problem-solving.

Alignment with Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

- **Standard 1.2** – Know students and how they learn: Supports reflection on family and community contexts to embed inclusive, respectful approaches to risky play.
- **Standard 1.5** – Know students and how they learn: Strengthens understanding of individualised approaches to risky play and the development of risk competence.
- **Standard 2.1** – Know the content and how to teach it: Builds knowledge and strategies for understanding and supporting risky play experiences.
- **Standard 3.3** – Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning: Supports intentional scaffolding of children's engagement in adventurous play.
- **Standard 4.4** – Maintain student safety: Strengthens confidence in identifying risk and hazard and using risk-benefit analysis.
- **Standard 7.2** – Comply with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements: Builds understanding of legal and regulatory expectations around safety and supervision.

Alignment with National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

- **Principle 1** – Leadership, governance and culture: Promotes service-wide reflection that prioritises children's wellbeing, agency and skill development over risk aversion.
- **Principle 2** – Children's rights, participation and voice: Supports children and young people to participate in decisions about risky play, including collaborative risk-benefit thinking.
- **Principle 3** – Children are taken seriously: Upholds child-led play and agency, valuing children's ideas, choices and perspectives.
- **Principle 4** – Families and communities: Strengthens respectful communication with families and communities about the value and purpose of risky play.
- **Principle 5** – Equity and diversity: Positions adventurous play as an individual need, supporting equitable access to challenge for all children.



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Alignment with the Kindy Uplift Key Priority Areas

Equity and Access for All

- Recognises that all children have a right to challenge and appropriate risk, regardless of background, ability, age, culture or confidence.
- Supports educators to identify and reduce adult-imposed barriers that limit access to physical challenge, particularly for children perceived as vulnerable.

Social and Emotional Learning

- Strengthens understanding of how risky play supports emotional regulation, confidence and social competence through safe experiences of challenge and recovery.
- Uses risky play as a context for fostering empathy, communication, self-advocacy and collaborative problem-solving.

Physicality

- Builds educator confidence to intentionally support gross motor development, balance, coordination, body awareness and spatial judgement through appropriate challenge.
- Expands physical learning beyond low-challenge activities to include rich, meaningful movement experiences.

Executive Function

- Enhances educators' capacity to strengthen executive function through play that requires planning, impulse control, working memory and flexible thinking.

Alignment with QKLG

Identity

- Risky play supports children to develop confidence, autonomy, resilience and a positive sense of self.

Wellbeing

- Appropriate challenge strengthens physical confidence, emotional regulation and the ability to cope with uncertainty.

Active learning

- Adventurous play builds persistence, curiosity, problem-solving and engagement in self-directed learning.



School Readiness Funding Menu

Please note this workshop is not on the SRF menu. It can however be utilised under flexible funding provisions. For more information on flexible funding go to the Victorian Department of Education website here:



For more information on the Phoenix Support SRF offerings, including those on the menu as well as flexible funding options, head to our website here:



Alignment with the SRF Priority Areas for use under Flexible Funding Options

Communication (language, literacy and numeracy)

- Creates rich language opportunities through shared risk–benefit thinking, describing sensations, problem-solving, negotiating, and reflecting on what felt challenging and what helped.
- Strengthens interaction and social play skills, such as noticing others, turn-taking, negotiating, and collaborative planning during adventurous play.
- Builds early STEAM and numeracy language through spatial concepts, measurement talk (high/low, fast/slow, near/far), patterning, sequencing, and predicting outcomes during movement-based play.

Wellbeing (Social, emotional and executive function)

- Supports children's emotional, social and physical wellbeing by strengthening opportunities for regulation, confidence, resilience and engagement through play-based challenge.
- Builds children's capacity for self-regulation, persistence, problem-solving and coping with uncertainty, supporting smoother transitions into school learning environments.
- Strengthens planning, impulse control, working memory and flexible thinking through play experiences that require judgement, adaptation and sustained attention.

Access, Inclusion and Participation

- Strengthens inclusive practice so all children can participate in appropriately challenging movement and play experiences.
- Supports fine and gross motor development (balance, coordination, body awareness), which increases participation in the program and independence in everyday self-care.
- Builds a stronger sense of belonging through intentional, relationship-based planning for adventurous play across the service.

Alignment with VELDYP

Outcome 1: Identity

- Builds confidence, autonomy and resilience as children test limits and experience themselves as capable.
- Supports a positive sense of self through opportunities to take considered risks and succeed.

Outcome 3: Wellbeing

- Strengthens physical confidence and emotional regulation through appropriate challenge and movement.
- Supports children to cope with uncertainty, frustration and recovery within safe, responsive environments.

Outcome 4: Confident and Involved Learners

- Promotes persistence, curiosity and problem-solving through adventurous, self-directed play.
- Encourages children to explore, experiment and engage deeply in learning experiences.