

Risk-benefit advice and record sheet

OPAL's RAPID approach to risk is an essential part of the OPAL Primary Programme

No school should offer the kinds of play that OPAL promotes without a robust and continually updated RAPID plan.

“Health and safety law in Great Britain has an enduring principle – that those who create risks are best placed to control them, and that they should do so in a reasonable and sensible way.”

Dame Judith Hackitt HSE Chair 2015

- R:** Risk-benefit assessment
- A:** Assemblies focused on playtime
- P:** Policy for play ratified by your governors or equivalent
- I:** Inspections carried out regularly
- D:** Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff

The purpose of **risk-benefit assessments** is to enable you to provide challenge, progression, excitement, creativity and fun in your play environment. They cannot and will not provide complete ‘safety’ and this is not their purpose. They can help you to think about, predict, and manage the most serious and most likely potential causes of harm.

OPAL's approach follows best practice advice from the Health and Safety Executive, The Play Safety Forum, Zurich Municipal Insurance, and local authority health and safety advisory teams.

OPAL has developed the five-part **R.A.P.I.D. response** (see box above) to managing risk in your school approach to play, which should be followed alongside the guidance on managing loose parts and other more risky play outlined in pack 6 and 6A of your OPAL ePack.

1. Risk-benefit assessment (RBA)

All services supporting children undertake risk assessments. The recommended practice for supporting play provision – and all services where the activity is risky but has benefits – is to make the benefits explicit in the assessment process from the outset. This has been recommended practice for all play provision since 2012.

Your RBA is a judgement tool. It is based on your knowledge and professional judgement balanced with the potential for benefit. Your RBAs should be active documents. They should be reviewed regularly and all children and staff supervising play should be aware of their content and use them to guide their play and practice. Every time a new item or section of play is opened up they should be added to. All changes should be communicated with all children and staff.

Common areas that need standing RBAs are:

- boundaries to dangerous areas
- tree management and tree climbing
- fixed play equipment
- broken loose parts and heavy loose parts
- rope tying (especially at height)
- water use and water features
- use of sharp or heavy tools.

You should carry out a written RBA:

- as part of an annual team site walkabout for any agreed significant risks
- when changes are introduced that have a reasonable chance of significant harm
- when your concerns are raised by more than once by staff
- when you have had serious 'near-miss' incidents or very frequent low-level injuries.

Your assessments should cover risks and hazards deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury. A template is provided below. Many others are available. You should adapt or adopt the format that is in usual use in your setting.

2. Assemblies focused on playtime

OPAL play assemblies should be held regularly with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play.

To start, hold assemblies every two weeks, settling to at least once every half term when the children and staff are confident in all aspects of their playtime opportunities and risks.

Assemblies should aim to:

- Celebrate your school's culture of play and children's creativity.
- Inform children of changes, rights, and agreements.
- Negotiate with children on issues such as risk, tidy-up and expected behaviours.
- Innovate around what children are currently playing to deepen children's engagement.

Play assemblies have dual purposes:

- To ensure that all children, staff and parents understand how much respect and regard your school has for the children's play.
- To ensure all children understand the risks and their responsibilities regarding the play opportunities, and that children and staff are involved in agreeing rules and ways of practice.

As part of your health and safety recording, a brief written log must be kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed. (Log on record sheet template 4.7). Further guidance on play assemblies is outlined in guidance Doc 3.4 and in past #TeaWithOPAL events, which can be accessed via the OPAL schools Slack.

3. Policy for play, ratified by your governors or equivalent

A play policy approved by the governing body and leadership is essential and should form the basis for the understanding of all staff and their decision-making about managing risk in play. A template is included in pack three.

This should include formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance (Doc 4.6) and your policy should include a statement on supervision styles (Doc 5.2 GUIDANCE Free range supervision).

4. Inspections carried out regularly

Engineered fixed equipment should have an annual technical inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections should be carried out by a member of staff and a record kept.

In addition, all play team members should be trained to constantly check for and remove hazards as part of their daily practice, with a clear knowledge of what and when to record, as well as appropriate responses.

5. Dynamic risk management and appropriate intervention styles are embraced by all staff

All staff in the playground and those with responsibility for children at play should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action if they think that the risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity of harm while preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

Dynamic risk management in playwork requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. The quality of play will suffer if the adult's attitude is one of hovering, anxious over-attention. There should be an assumption that most play is not dangerous and that children can develop a high degree of competence, given practice, over time. However, staff should also be vigilant, and they should be aware of the kinds of play and resources being used in their patch, who is playing and what the likely risks are.

All play team staff **must** be trained and reminded that active risk management is an essential part of their job using the OPAL online *Playwork Essentials for Primary Schools* course and training book. They should be observant, mobile and attentive at all times.

Most of the time they will not need to intervene but should be ready to:

- **stop the activity or manage the risk** if staff think that *serious harm* (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation) is imminent or probable.
- **remain vigilant and consider negotiating how to manage the risk with the children** if they think that serious harm is possible but not probable.
- **continue ranging supervision** if serious harm is very unlikely.

It is important that new staff joining the play team are trained to the same level as existing staff.



Remember the law does not require you not to have accidents, but to understand the reasons for the risk you provide and to demonstrate the reasonable steps you have taken to manage those risks.

Example of a risk-benefit assessment. These should be brief and clear.

Risk-benefit assessment date:

Assessed by:

Description of activity, principle or object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or utility or related policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action date
<p>Injury from activities in the playground</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ball games are permitted in designated areas to create a quiet area. • Pupils only allowed to play games that are considered within pupils individual capabilities as decided by staff. • Games can be stopped at any time by staff if considered unsafe or inappropriate. Discussion regarding safety will take place. • Activities to be age appropriate and reflect the mix of ages within the school as well as special needs of pupils. • The schools behaviour policy applies on the playground. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunchtime supervisors to discuss any unusual uses of play equipment with Deputy/Head Teacher. Decisions made and confirmed in OPAL Play assemblies. 	<p>Play leaders Opal lead SLT</p>	

<p>Lack of adult supervision</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunchtime supervisors have areas of responsibility for supervision timetabled. • Playground rota has specific areas for adults to 'Monitor.' • Play leaders to make SLT aware if unsupervised zones. 	<p>Play leaders Opal lead SLT</p>	
<p>Unsafe equipment</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Pre – use checks of play equipment by school logged. • • Quarterly inspections of play equipment by school recorded. • • Play equipment is given an annual safety inspection by a competent person • • All furniture is kept in good condition. i.e. free from splinters, loose joints, protruding bolts or screws etc. • • The supervision assessment accounted for the risk of injury using the play equipment. • • Staff supervising use of play equipment understand how the equipment is to be used. 	<p>OPAL lead Play team</p>	

<p>Digging area use of real hand tools Hurting fingers Accidental blows Use as weapon Risk to players and bystanders</p>	<p>All those in play policy – plus Upper body strength Creativity Core strength Enjoyment</p>	<p>Hand washing procedures in place Tools not toys training in play assembly Only diggers in the digging zone (Tyres to zone out area) Only plastic hand tools, not spades Wellies need to be worn in zone Adult roaming supervision</p>	<p>Play Leaders</p>	
<p>Scooters Physical injuries Accidental collisions Safe storage</p>	<p>Physical movement Gross motor skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily checks by playleaders to tighten handles using Alan key • Set area for scooters to be used in yard to avoid collisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult roaming supervision • Adult supervises storage and opening of folding scooters – left upright and open every day • No helmets needed to be worn, playzone small to reduce speed and not used at heights. 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	
<p>Mud Kitchen Cuts/abrasion other physical injury Mud in eyes Ingest mud</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operation • Exploring media • Motor skills • Speaking and listening skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules around safe use of equipment • Ensure equipment is used for intended purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment regularly checked for damage. Removed if so. • Hand washing procedures in place 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	

<p>Balls games</p> <p>Minor injury from contact, trips and falls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordination • Upper body strength • Cross crawl movement • Speaking and listening skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure items are used only for their intended purpose. • Games to be played in appropriate location Zone activities e.g. balls for ball games 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	
<p>Water Play</p> <p>Minor risk of drowning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity • Teamwork • Sensory play • Exploring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children to be shown how to use hose sensibly and instructed to NOT drink from pipe. • Adult roaming supervision • Small water bottles used • Water to be used in mud play not separate water area. 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	
<p>Clothes</p> <p>Minor risk of suffocation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity • Teamwork • Sensory • Imagination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dressing up clothes including shoes to be in good condition. Visual inspections of clothing to take place on a regular basis and unsuitable garments to be disposed of immediately. • Children to be reminded of safe use of resources. Immediate intervention by staff if children use equipment inappropriately 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	

<p>Sand pit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operation • Exploring media • Motor skills • Speaking and listening skills • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules around safe use of equipment • Ensure equipment is used for intended purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment regularly checked for damage. Removed if so. • Hand washing procedures in place 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	
<p>Tyre Play</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children can roll them, which is good for core and upper body strengthening. - - Climbing and balancing on them to develop coordination. - Cooperation - Creativity - Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From OPAL guidance doc (6.11) Potential injuries could come from nails left in tyres, protruding wires or little wear Imaginative, creative play. • Children briefed and reminded of stacking tyres and climbing on tyres no higher than themselves (on grass or soil) • With larger tyres, there is a risk of injury when moving. The risk with smaller tyres will arise from their use. Children will want to stack them, get inside them, roll them around and build large structures. houses, forts, shops etc from tyres and wood. 	<p>Play leaders</p>	

<p>Tree Climbing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tree climbing builds self-esteem, confidence, physical strength, hand-eye coordination, prediction, planning and provides opportunities for pride and a sense of achievement. The urge to be up high is very strong and instinctive in children especially as they gain confidence in their bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E= BS EN guidance as for fixed climbing equipment, that is a maximum of 1.5m height of free fall onto grass or loose soil. • Designated “safe” trees to climb identified and shared in play assembly • Risk that child falls onto of another on way down or tree branch- safe play showed in play assembly. No-one in landing zone. • 4 point rule of tree climbing explained to children- children not safe to climb if not following the rules • Children shown how to test dead branches for strength • Children shown to talk not physically help in rescue in play assembly 	<p>Play Leaders</p>	
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