

Risky play and growing up: How to understand the overprotection of the next generation ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Article available on Research Gate ^[2]

Introduction

The term “play” is often correlated in adult minds with “having fun.” While this is often a fair presumption, it can be taken too far. Play also has its dark side, about which relatively little is known, in which children and young people push the boundaries by carrying out physical, emotional, and social experiments. The gathering evidence is that this risk-taking behavior is an essential contributor to development. However, if you subscribe solely to “the play is fun” doctrine, any kind of risk is seen as undesirable and a target for elimination. Thus, there are many websites that warn against the risks of play and emphasize strategies of control. For example, the US National Safety Council maintains a page entitled “Playgrounds don’t have to hurt,” which is concerned with the type of surfacing present in conventional playgrounds (National Safety Council, 2016). A consequence of this way of thinking has been a continuing drive by some professional interests, including safety engineers and pediatricians (e.g., Canadian Paediatric Society, 2012), to mitigate or eliminate playground risks, which has in turn generated its own research agenda focusing on risk minimization. In addition, this has further raised questions on the balance between safety legislation, safety standards, and litigation versus the benefits such play offers to children’s development (Ball, 1995, 2002, 2004; Chalmers, 2003; Freeman, 1995; Furedi, 2001; Little, 2006; Satomi and Morris, 1996; S. J. Smith, 1998; Stephenson, 2003). An exaggerated safety focus in children’s play is problematic. Children should avoid injuries, but children also need challenges and varied stimulation to develop normally, both physically and mentally.

Related link: What is the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in children? A systematic review ^[3]

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Links

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