Risk-Benefit Assessment
Archibald First School

"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 H&SE Chair 2015

The purpose of **Risk-benefit Assessments (RBA)** 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 has developed the five-part **R.A.P.I.D. Response**

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**

1. Risk-benefit Assessment

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.

Common areas that need standing risk-benefit assessments 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.
- when Your assessments should cover risks and hazards deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury.

2. Assemblies

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:

- **C**elebrate you school's culture of play and children's creativity.
- **I**nform children of changes, rights, and agreements.
- **N**egotiate with children on issues such as risk, tidy-up and expected behaviours.
- **I**nnovate 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.

A brief written log must be kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed.

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3. Policy

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.

4. Inspections

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 when to record and appropriate responses.

5. Dynamic Risk Management

All staff in the playground and 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 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 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 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** if they think that serious harm is possible but not probable.
- **note and move on** 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.

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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.

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Example which can be edited accordingly

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
Large loose parts Falling on children Crushing injuries Heavy lifting Could involve players or bystanders	All those listed in play policy plus – core strength, coordination, cooperation, creativity. Items are essential to a rich play environment.	Agree stacking heights in play assembly. No double size pallets Large dens only in supervised den zone	OPAL Lead	
Digging area use of real spades Chopping feet Accidental blows Use as weapon Risk to players and bystanders	All those in play policy – plus Upper body strength Creativity Core strength Enjoyment	Tools not toys training in play assembly Only diggers in the digging zone Only spades not forks	Play Coordinator	

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