

4.0 TEMPLATE 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: July 2024

Assessed by: OPAL working group

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 Planks of wood – safety rules for carrying	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	June 24
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	Sept 24
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
Use of tyres Rolling down hills Burns and grazes to skin Collecting water that is turning stagnant Risk to bystanders	All those listed in play policy Plus – enjoyment, experimentation, creative play and managing risks	Play Assembly reminders of safety rules Agree stacking heights in play assembly. Visual checks by play team and children. Drill holes in large tyres to let water out	Play coordinator	July 24



Wheeled Play – scooters, buggys and suitcases Accidental blows – collisions Risk to players and bystanders Children zipping each other in suitcases Cuts and Grazes Getting fingers caught in mechanisms, straps or zips	All those listed in play policy Plus – upper body strength, coordination, balance, enjoyment, creativity, managing space, role play motor skills, coordination, strength.	Play Assembly reminders of safety rules One way system for scooter track. No Helmets – to minimise risk in other zones. Marked out agreed area.	Play coordinator	Sept 24
Den Building Injuries: Bumps or bruises from falling crates. Getting fingers caught in between crates when stacking. Cuts from broken or sharp edges.	All those listed in play policy Plus – enjoyment, experimentation, creative play and managing risks Transporting materials. Building possibly linked to role play	Play Assembly reminders of safety rules Regular checks of all equipment	Play coordinator OPAL Team Play team	June 24
Sand Play Sand pit possible attraction for cats, dogs and fox faeces. Sand in eyes.	All those listed in play policy Plus – enjoyment, experimentation, creative play and managing risks, sensory	Play Assembly reminders of safety rules Covered by net at end of play Wash hands on return to classroom and before eating lunch No throwing/eating sand Regular checks of all equipment Pit checked daily by the OPAL team, caretaker and monitored throughout the day by staff. Sandpit covered at the end of every day. New Sand added annually.	Play Coordinator OPAL Team Play team	Sept 24
Mud Kitchen Splinters from wood, scratches from loose screws, bumps, cuts or bruises from falling or tripping whilst in or	All those listed in play policy Plus – enjoyment, experimentation, creative play and managing risks, sensory	Play Assembly reminders of safety rules Mud created in marked area	Play Coordinator Play team	Sept 24



around the pallets, trapped hands between the gaps in the pallets.	Enjoyment, role play, communication, team work, playing cooperatively, turn taking.	No throwing/eating mud Regular checks of all equipment No sharp objects to be used Wash hands on return to classroom and before eating lunch		
Rolling down the bank Children slipping and injuring themselves in wet weather either on the bank or in the wooded area.	All those listed in play policy Plus – enjoyment, experimentation, creative play and managing risks, Active outdoor play at all times of the year is an important part of obesity prevention and helps to establish life-long patterns of healthy physical exercise.	Play Assembly reminders of safety rules Children to use a friend to ensure stop point Roll individually – no group rolling	Play team	Sept 24
Tree Climbing Injuries: Trees unsafe to climb: potential injury falling from trees with thin or weak branches. Scratches from tree branches or bark. Bruises from bumps and falls. Increased risk from children who require support depending on ability. Slips. Injuries from lower level branches. Cuts from sharp/snapped branches. Potential damage to trees.	Pleasure it gives children. Tree climbing allows for extension of motor skills and assessment of own risk, health, wellbeing and confidence. Upper body strength. Contact with nature and appreciation for the environment, social skills.	Regular tree inspections – annually. Trees marked for identification. No more than 2/3 children climbing a tree. 3 point contact rule. Play Assembly reminders of safety rules. Branch thickness to be thicker than arm. Height agreed – no climbing higher than own height. Outdoor shoes only.	OPAL Team Play team	TBC