



TASMANIAN
CATHOLIC
education commission

POLICY

Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning

RELATED DOCUMENTS

TCEC Workplace Health and Safety Policy
School/College Workplace Health and Safety Policy
School/College Risk Management Policy
School/College Procurement Policy
School/College Excursion Policy
Archdiocese of Hobart, Workplace Health and Safety Policy
Archdiocese of Hobart, Risk Management Policy

Sports Risk Management Guidelines
COP How to Manage Health and Safety Risks
COP Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination

Policy No: 05:2013



Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning Policy

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1. RATIONALE

This Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Learning Policy document has been formulated to support the work of those involved in the provision and use of play spaces within our schools and in providing positive learning experiences outside of the classroom and school environment. The spirit and intent of the Risk and Adventure In Outdoor Learning Policy is to ensure that all parties are aware of their obligations both in providing rich, safe and inspiring play spaces to enable children to grow and develop to their full potential in accordance with our Gospel values while ensuring the safest possible environment for those experiences.

The policy is designed to ensure Work Health and Safety requirements are met and reinvigorate the play spaces and outdoor learning experiences as areas for learning complete with reasonable, and appropriately identified, controlled or managed risk-taking, aimed at developing skills and understandings.

"Although the term 'risk-taking' often has negative connotations, the reality is that the willingness to engage in some (appropriately managed or controlled) risky activities provides opportunities to learn new skills, try new behaviours and ultimately reach our potential. Challenge and risk, in particular during outdoor play, allows children to test the limits of their physical, intellectual and social development" (Little, H & Wyver, S, 2009).

2. POLICY

Students in our schools will be provided with valuable learning experiences both within the school grounds and on excursions. These experiences will not be free of all risk but will be experiences where risk-benefit analysis has shown that the benefits of the experience and the appropriate control or management of these risks outweigh the reasonable risks which may be involved. Where risks are identified reasonable practicable steps will be taken to eliminate unacceptable risks and/or manage/control acceptable risks through management of the activity.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1. Outdoor learning

Learning experiences which take place outside of the classroom or school buildings. These may be onsite or offsite, play or planned experiences.

3.2. Play

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons." (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group 2005)

3.3. Excursions

School excursions are structured learning experiences provided by, or under the auspices of, the school which are conducted external to the school site.

3.4. Hazards

A situation or thing that has the potential to harm a person

3.5. Risk

The possibility that harm (death, injury or illness) might occur when exposed to a hazard.

3.6. Risk Management Process

Taking action to eliminate health and safety risk so far as is reasonably practicable and if that is not possible, minimising the risks so far as is reasonably practicable. Eliminating a hazard will also eliminate any risks associated with that hazard. In accordance with Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice.

3.7. Reasonable Risk-taking

'Reasonable risk taking' means the responsible person has recognised the risk, examined the hazards, balanced the likelihood of an accident happening against the severity of the harm that would take place if it did happen, and taken the appropriate action to control or manage the risk (Knight, S. 2011. P 103).

3.8. Risk-benefit

An analysis of the benefits of an activity balanced against an estimation of the risks of that activity.

4. Roles

Role of the Principal

The Principal has the responsibility to ensure they have current knowledge and awareness of age appropriate safety management practice for outdoor learning and excursions, and be aware of the type of experiences being offered by their school. Furthermore they shall use appropriate resources and processes to eliminate unacceptable risks and appropriately manage or control suitable learning experiences. Finally they shall review and monitor the impact of this Policy on learning opportunities and WHS outcomes.

The Principal shall ensure:

- that all documentation is completed including a Risk Assessment and, if required, a Risk Benefit Analysis, and wider WHS practices as recommended in relevant Codes of Practice, such as consultation, coordination and cooperation.
- that learning opportunities are not being restricted by fear of litigation around WHS concerns
- educators and parents are aware of the conditions that require a risk benefit analysis to be carried out

For outdoor learning within the school a Risk Assessment and, if required, a Risk Benefit Analysis should be carried out when the space is created or new items included or conditions change. An ongoing review of the area shall be carried out to ensure risks are being controlled as planned as per the Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice.

Role of the teacher and teacher assistant/other staff

The staff planning for outdoor play or learning have the responsibility for providing quality learning experiences and this is supported by:

- managing risks by eliminating health and safety risks so far as is reasonably practicable, and if it is not reasonably practicable to do so, to minimise those risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

In the case of excursions full documentation shall accompany an application to the Principal for the event. This should include the identified risks and the management strategies to be employed. This documentation would result from the Risk Management Process.

For outdoor play, the Risk Management Process would be ongoing and require periodic planned, as well as timely reviews of control measures to ensure the safety of the students.

Role of Parents

Parents shall take reasonable care of their health and safety and that their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others. They shall comply with any reasonable instruction given by the School and participate in consultation, cooperation and coordination of activities guided by this Policy.

Role of Students

Students shall take reasonable care of their health and safety and that their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others. Students shall also follow any reasonable instruction given by the School to comply with this Policy.

5. Background:

*Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, **the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.***

- Play is important for children's well-being and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities the goal is not to eliminate all risk, only the unreasonable risk

- Those providing play opportunities should focus on managing or controlling the unacceptable risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion

Perceptions or interpretations of WHS requirements have resulted in decisions to curtail or cancel some activities rather than take steps to appropriately control or manage identified risks. This has resulted in the very real risk that children are not being provided with learning opportunities that are essential for their physical, emotional and intellectual development.

6. PRINCIPLES

Play and exploration is a fundamental human right for all children, regardless of age, gender, culture, social class or disability. This needs to be reflected in the range of play environments and outdoor learning opportunities we offer children to ensure that all are able to engage in experiences that help improve their quality of life.

Those working with children shall ensure that they undertake a risk management process as set out in the Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice.

While elimination of hazards is the preference it may not be possible “if doing so means that you cannot make the end product or deliver the service” (Safe Work Australia How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks: Code of Practice). In this case the product or service is education. It is our responsibility to educate children to learn to take informed and reasonable risk.

The Victorian Health Foundation Study “Nothing but fear itself” (2010) noted the following benefits of physical activity:

- 1 Children learn to regulate their emotions
- 2 Children learn to engage in exploratory behaviour
- 3 Children learn to communicate effectively
- 4 Children become more self-directed
- 5 Children develop greater intellectual flexibility

- 6 Children come to possess some degree of introspection, and
- 7 Children develop greater self-efficacy in meeting life's challenges

They also note the health benefits of physical activity including decreased obesity and diabetes rates, improved cardiovascular function and lower rates of mental health problems.

Tim Gill (2007) poses four arguments in support of risk in activity:

- 1 Helping children to learn to manage risk (understanding safety)
- 2 Feeding children's innate need for risk with reasonable risks in order to prevent them finding greater un-managed risks for themselves
- 3 Health and developmental benefits
- 4 Developmental benefits including the building of character and personality traits such as resilience and self-reliance

Through PLAY and outdoor experiences children are given the opportunity to:

- Take informed and reasonable risks and make mistakes
- Make informed and reasonable choices that involve challenge
- Use a range of tools and equipment safely
- Experience a range of activities which will encourage interest and curiosity
- Be assisted to build the confidence to take manageable and controllable risks
- Develop an understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges
- Learn to assess risks for themselves with help from adults

7. REQUIREMENTS

Each school seeks to do all that is reasonably practicable to:

- Manage or control the risks in children's playing and outdoor learning but not allow unreasonable and/or overly pedantic risk management processes to be the guiding principle when creating play spaces and facilities and planning excursions.
- Ensure that policy development, planning and decision making and documentation of these supports children's play and quality outdoor learning experiences .
- Develop and provide to parents, clear statements of beliefs around play provision and outdoor learning provision which include a statement outlining how we ensure risks are

assessed and unacceptable risks removed while acceptable risk is managed or controlled appropriately.

- Ensure all staff understand the importance of play and outdoor experiences in children's lives and how to reconcile the WHS requirements and the learning needs of students.

8. Risk-Benefit Analysis

The law imposes a duty on a person to eliminate the risk to health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable, and if not reasonably practicable to do so, to minimise the risk as far as is reasonably practicable this does not mean eliminating all risks. The emphasis should be on eliminating unacceptable risks and managing or controlling acceptable risks. It follows that, for every experience, an appropriate person should decide if the balance between risk and opportunity is appropriate for the learners concerned.

Risk/benefit analysis consciously balances the benefits of an experience against the intrinsic risks along with risk assessment.

Educators taking children and young people outdoors are uniquely placed to manage this process. They should adopt an *enabling* attitude towards outdoor learning that identifies exciting, creative opportunities for learning.

Where appropriate they should use published guidance and the advice of senior staff and specialists to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

Sometimes in planning, eliminating or controlling a hazard may seem so daunting that offering the experience seems impossible. That is the point for serious consideration involving appropriate consultation, coordination and cooperation amongst relevant duty holders but not necessarily the moment to cancel plans.

Children and young people should not be denied an experience simply because a hazard could not be completely eliminated. A venture where all conceivable risk has been eliminated removes the opportunities for learners to develop their own strategies and attitudes towards risk this type of action can of itself create other risks. Learners should be at the centre of the risk management process from the outset.

Risk has both positive and negative aspects. With careful thought and planning it is possible to

remove unreasonable risks and manage or control hazards arising out of a venture without extinguishing the possibility of personal adventure at the heart of outdoor learning.

In planning and considering risks and benefits it is important to consider:

- Is the level of challenge appropriate to the learner group?
- How will risks be assessed and balanced against the benefits that can be expected?
- Can the rationale for this experience be justified even if events don't go according to plan?
- Are the management arrangements appropriate to the location selected?
- Are the leadership and supervisory staff appropriately skilled, qualified and experienced?
- Are there any relevant examples of good practice that we can draw on?

9. Myths re risks

Health and safety laws exist to protect workers and others from death, serious injury and ill health at work, not to ruin children's playtime or outdoor learning experiences. **We have identified that in some cases not providing children with play or outdoor learning experiences may of itself create risk.**

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SIGNED:



TCEC Chairperson

DATE:

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