

4.0 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: 24/11/25

Assessed by: Curriculum Lead for Play

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 Mrs Abdi (M-W)/Mrs Rashid (M-F)	
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	Mrs Souk Elba	
Ball Games area Accidental blows Risk to players and bystanders Hit with balls Falling over	All those in play policy – plus Upper body strength Fitness Core strength Enjoyment Competition	Year group rota. (limits children inside) Coned area. Bystanders need to be aware of what is going on (discussed in assembly)	Play Coordinator (Mr Bahad or Elba)	
Chalk Area Eating chalk Poked in eye Risk to players and bystanders	All those listed in play policy plus – creativity, fun	Chalk refilled weekly. Ensure all chalk is returned to avoid them being crushed.	SMSA - Mariam	



Games Area Cut on toys Throwing toys Risk to players and bystanders	All those listed in play policy plus – creativity, imagination, competition,	Toys treated with care (assemblies) Any broken crates fixed or disposed of. No small toys that can be swallowed.	Mrs Samra (T-F) Saira (M)	
Wheels Area Run over Falling off Risk to players and bystanders Trapped inside suitcase	All those in play policy – plus Upper body strength Fitness Core strength Enjoyment	Bikes, scooters etc checked before use. Helmets must be worn. Supervised at all times. No hands in pockets. Holes punch in suitcases for air. No locks	Miss Gribble Saira (T 12:30) Afsana (W 12:30) Kay (Th 12:30)	
Sandpit Area Sand in eyes and mouth hand caught in pulley Hit with equipment Risk to players and bystanders	All those in play policy – plus Upper body strength Fitness Core strength Enjoyment Creativity	Limited children allowed in. Agreement on how to use sand (assembly).	Mrs Grewal(M-W) /Saira (W 12:30 & Th - F)	
Dance Area Falling over Hitting/throwing equipment	All those in play policy – plus Enjoyment Creativity	Dance in your own space. Use equipment sensibly. Be mindful of others.	Miss Gribble Saira (T 12:30) Afsana (Wed 12:30) Kay (Th 12:30)	
Small world area Throwing equipment Choking on toys/stones	All those in play policy - plus language Creativity	Agreement on how to use it Regular Safety Checks and Supervision	Miss Gribble Saira (T 12:30)	



		On going maintenance	Afsana (Wed 12:30) Kay (Th 12:30)	
Dress up Area Strangled by clothing Falling off chair	All those in play policy – plus Enjoyment Creativity Imagination	Respect the clothes and put them away neatly.	Miss Gribble Saira (T 12:30) Afsana (Wed 12:30) Kay (Th 12:30)	
Garden Area Chopping feet Accidental blows Use as weapon Risk to players and bystanders Falling from tree	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 Supervised while tree climbing	Elba Miss Varella 1:1/ Mandeep 1:1	
Library - games Paper cuts falling off seats	All those in play policy - plus team work memory enjoyment	Keep the games stored in their boxes when not in use. Do not play with them outside the library.	Mrs Kaur	
Reading Area Falling off seats Shutting fingers in door Falling from house Paper cuts Falling onto planters Stuck behind house	All those in play policy – plus Creativity Social Mindfulness	Books will be checked daily Seats stay in place and do not move. Supervised when in house.	Mrs Samra (T-F) Saira (M)	
Water Area Drowning Wet Clothes Water contamination	All those in play policy – plus Enjoyment Creativity	Water changed regularly Staff supervising area Water safety talks	Elba Miss Varella 1:1/ Mandeep 1:1	



STEM - Library Choking or ingestion hazards Cuts or punctures Damage to equipment	Encourages problem-solving and critical thinking Develops fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination Fosters curiosity and independent learning	Children must only use screwdrivers under adult supervision. Ensure the screwdriver is the correct size for the activity to prevent slipping. Teach children to handle tools carefully, pointing them away from themselves and others. Store screwdrivers safely when not in use, out	Mrs Kaur	
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