

Ellen Sandseter's 6 Categories Of Risky Play

This handout is based on research analysis completed by Ellen Sandster for her doctoral thesis entitled *Scary Funny—A Qualitative Study Of Risky Play Among Preschool Children*. She writes that her results, “indicated that experiencing both exhilaration and fear at the same time was the primary goal of engagement in risky play.”

Great Heights



Rapid Speeds



Dangerous Tools



Dangerous Elements



Rough And Tumble



Disappearing Or Getting Lost



Children seek opportunities to climb to great heights as well as, jump, balance, hang, or swing from those heights.

Interacting with great heights helps kids face fears and build confidence.

Climbing to great heights comes with the risk of injury from falling.

Children seek opportunities to run, swing, slide, sled, bicycle, skate, roll, ride, and spin at rapid speeds.

Moving at rapid speeds helps children understand and use their bodies.

Moving at rapid speeds can lead to injury from collision.

Children seek opportunities to use potentially dangerous tools like knives, saws, axes, rope, power tools, machinery, etc.

Using dangerous tools helps children build confidence and skills.

Using dangerous tools can lead to injuries and wounds.

Children seek opportunities to engage with potentially dangerous elements such as fire or deep, cold, or moving water.

Engaging with dangerous elements is a chance to face fears and understand the world.

Engaging with dangerous elements can lead to injuries and wounds.

Children seek opportunities to play fight, wrestle, chase, sword fight with sticks or pool noodles, etc.

Rough and tumble play is a chance to hone physical and social skills.

Participating in rough and tumble play can lead to physical injuries like scratches and bruises.

Children seek opportunities to play and explore unfamiliar spaces either alone or in small groups.

Disappearing or getting lost offers a temporary scary thrill.

Allowing children to play at disappearing or getting lost could result in a child *really* getting lost.



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