



Risk Benefit Approach to risk assessment

This document is designed to help support you and your school to easily write a comprehensive Risk Benefit Assessment (RBA) for outdoor learning.

What is Risk benefit?

Many risks also carry benefits, and these help us to weigh up how to address the risk of the activity appropriately.

An example is fox and cat poo – commonly found in school grounds.

By teaching children to look out for buried poo (cat) or poo in strange and prominent places (fox) we are teaching them to manage their own risk, to act appropriately (tell an adult) and educating them about the animals we share our environment with. This offsets the risk as the children are informed about the correct response should they find poo, know not to touch it and if accidental contact is made know to thoroughly clean themselves and to tell an adult. This is radically different from a traditional risk assessment which would generally suggest a thorough site inspection before use and/or keeping children away from the infected area. As we know this is not always possible so involving the children in site inspection and awareness is not only educational but also time saving.

How to write a risk benefit assessment:

There are many types of risk assessments and the thought of choosing and writing one can be overwhelming and confusing. Your school will already have risk assessments in place for a massive range of activities from a local walk to threading a needle! Find one that is close, perhaps an outdoor or PE activity, and use the same format but with an added column for benefits.

If your school is risk averse and has strict playtime and PE assessments, it can help to read

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

and

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/sensible-leadership/common.htm>

Common risks and benefits associated with outdoor learning are listed below to help you fill out your school's template. Do think of any other risks that might be unique to your school, a look at PE and playtime risk assessments can help to highlight these.

Common Hazards, risks and benefits to Outdoor Learning

Hazard	Risk	Benefit
Soil	Tetanus Toxoplasmosis Skin irritation Soil in eyes	• Contact with beneficial bacteria for a healthy immune system • Awareness of hygiene and germs • Healthy attitude to perceived dirt • Understanding nature, gardening and food production • Children take place in assessing risk of contamination - raising awareness of risk • Children learn to recognise animal feces
Weather	Sunburn Dehydration Slipping Dust and debris blowing around Extreme cold/ hypothermia	• Awareness of seasons • Awareness and management of own health wellbeing • Learn about and experience the weather first hand • Children aware of dangers of different seasons/ weather conditions
Climbing	Falling	• Awareness of risk • Awareness of safety limits
Canes and sticks	Injury	• Multiple uses for outdoor learning • Teaches resourcefulness • Multiple construction possibilities
Rubbish/litter	Injuries Disease	• Manage personal risk and health • Assess own safety • Awareness of hygiene and germs • Children take place in assessing risk of contamination - raising awareness of risk
Leaves	Slips Trips Buried feces/ litter	• Learn about recycling • Awareness of the planet and environment including life cycles • Awareness of hygiene • Children take place in assessing risk of contamination - raising awareness of risk • Children learn to recognise animal feces
Lifting	Injury/Strain	• Manage personal risk and health • Assess own safety
Woodland activities	Falls, trips and slips Stings Thorns Injury from sticks Injury from collision Injury from equipment Disease	• Offers the experience of free play and structured activities in an unstructured area • Manage personal risk and health • Assess own safety • Children learn about nature and their role within it • Offers endless opportunities for creative, inventive activities and play • Awareness of hygiene and germs • Awareness of life cycles of animals and plants
Ropes, string	Misuse of twine/rope leading to injury Strangulation	• Team building skills • Awareness of risk and danger • Learn knots and other practical skills • Creative and constructive play/learning • Inventive and problem solving activities
Den building	Injury	• Team building skills • Awareness of risk and danger • Learn knots and other practical skills • Creative and constructive play/learning • Offers endless opportunities for creative, inventive activities and play • Improved problem-solving skills • Improved design and technology skills • Development of confidence, resilience and well-being.

Once the risks and benefits are filled in, list the control/actions that can be done to minimize the risk. The control/action for den building, for example, could be:

- Children aware of risks of scavenged materials when constructing and dangers of using them
- Children to be briefed on practical den building and the risk of collapse
- Children to be supervised at all times during den building
- Children to be involved with site inspection

Dynamic risk assessing:

We have produced a short video as part of our training series that helps to illustrate dynamic risk assessing ([click here to watch it](#)). Being outdoors is always subject to changes in the environment and the weather and having the opportunity to note down any unusual or environmental risks in addition to your normal RBA will support an effective risk approach at your school. Please see below for a simple table showing a sample Dynamic Risk Assessment.

Date		Signature	
Site conditions		Weather conditions	
Other potential risks		Control/Action	

Further reading and help:

For more information on risk benefit, a completed sample assessment and a blank template click on the following link to Play England:

<https://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/risk-benefit-assessment-form/>

And if you are in Scotland: Play Scotland:

<https://www.playscotland.org/play/playful-learning/managing-risk-play-provision/>

Many schools are members of Consortium of Local Education Authorities for the Provision of Science Services (CLEAPPS) who also offer risk assessments for learning outside.

<http://primary.cleapss.org.uk/Resource/P094-Working-safely-outdoors.aspx>