

# Reinventing Risk:

Encouraging Risky Play  
Through Family Partnerships

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Misha Davydov

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**play (n):**

activity engaged in for enjoyment and  
recreation, especially by children





# What is play?

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Dr. Stewart Brown (2010) defines play as having seven main attributes:

- Purposeless
- Voluntary
- Inherently attractive
- Free from time
- Self-diminishing
- Able to be improvised
- Self-perpetuating



# What is play?

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Play is:

- Personal
- Social
- Calming/exciting
- Immersive
- Biological
- Cathartic/stress reducing





# What are the benefits of play?

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Play helps us:

- Relieve stress
- Focus
- Maintain healthy bodies, minds, souls
- Acquire/practice necessary skills
- Connect (personally and environmentally)
- Form positive associations

Some benefits are yet to be fully discovered

- Multi-generational (epigenetic)





# Why does play need defending?

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Societal obstacles to play are:

- Time
- Energy
- Risk aversion
- Academic rigor
- Space/resources
  - Loss of green space, diminished community access
- Fear of the outside world
  - “Stranger danger”



**risk (v):**

expose (someone or something valued) to  
danger, harm, or loss





# What is risk?

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Risk is:

- Not the same as danger
- Personal/internally defined
- Exciting
- An exercise in probability





# How are risk and play connected?

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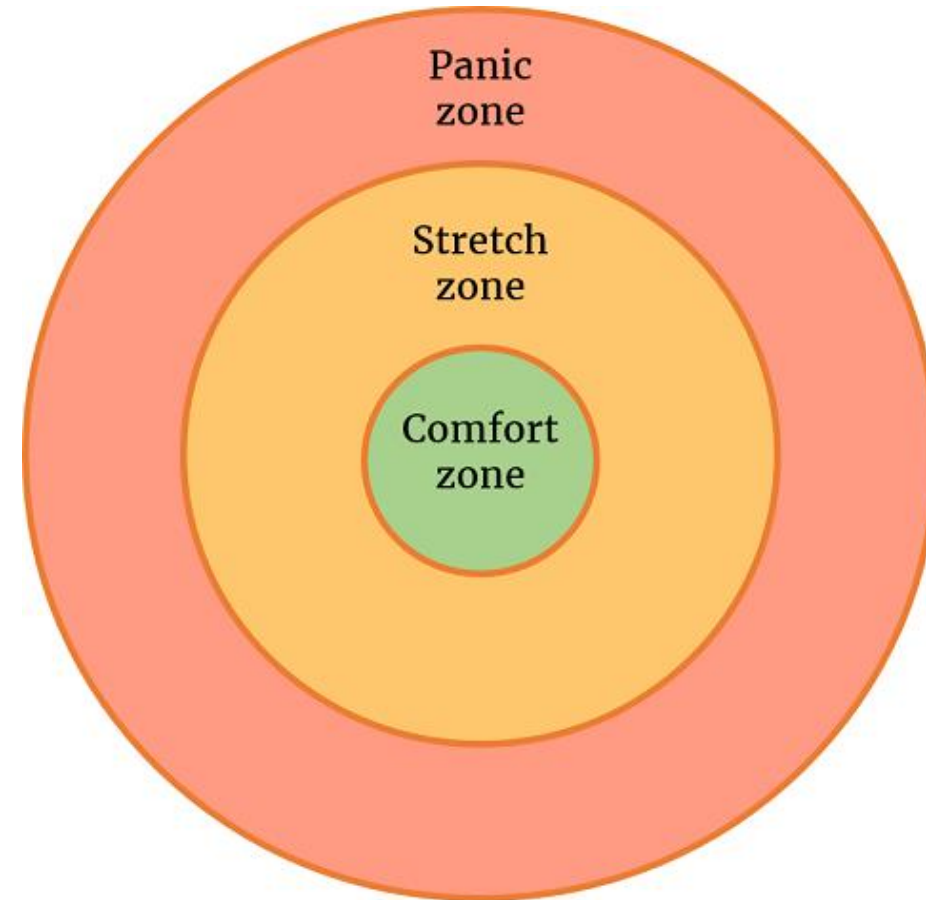
Play is universally beneficial, but not all play is the same

Risky play (definition)

Play that involves the intentional or unintentional pushing of boundaries is “risky play”

- Typically, used to refer to high intensity physical/gross motor play
- Not all risky play is physical







# Why is risky play important?

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Risky play can be:

- Intense
- Sensorial
- Personally gratifying
- Exhausting

Risky play engenders feelings of pride, accomplishment

- Builds confidence
- High-performance play showcases acumen

Risky play as a metric for assessment





# How do we encourage risky play?

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Cultivate environments of “controlled risk”

Keep children safe while allowing them to flex minds and bodies

Change the language and culture surrounding risk

Provide greater access to the outdoors

Create a climate of less structured play





# Risk Assessment

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Fundamental to children's (and adults') ability to navigate risk

Requires an intimate knowledge of personal ability

Teachers, parents, guardians can encourage introspection in moments of risk

- "Are you sure you are ready for that?"
- "Do you feel safe right now?"
- "What do you need to do to be successful?"
- "What went wrong? How can you do it differently next time?"

Trust them!







# How do we get parents to support risky play?

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With time, attention, and patience

Show parents and guardians the research!

Invest in families, learn about their play

Talk about play with parents, facilitate

Encourage and empower parents to be a positive example

Foster contexts for community play within and without schools

- Break down sensations, impressions afterwards





# How do we get parents to support risky play?

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Show them what, show them how

- Document students' experiences, illustrate their growth
- Explain "controlled risk" environs, invite them to do the same
- Nature is a powerful, openly available tool

Explain and practice risk assessment language, strategies

- "Do you feel safe?" vs. "That's not safe."

Be an example

Be honest and open about fear, encourage them to do the same

Meet with parents, brainstorm ways to create environments of controlled risk





# Relationships

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Risk-taking is a function of trust

New ideas are scary

Building relationships with students, parents is paramount

Meet fear and apprehension with honesty, openness, and support





# An Invitation

Lead by example; play  
begets play

Spend more time  
within the “flex zone”

Be intentional about  
risk-taking





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