

Let us out of the bubble-wrap

How adults can support children's need for risky play

Children need and want to create challenge and uncertainty as part of their play. Remember jumping off higher and higher steps? Swinging round with a friend until you fell over? Climbing trees? Balancing along high walls? Play fighting?

This play helps children to be emotionally and physically resilient, to have flexible responses to difficult and changing situations. So, far from putting our children in danger of harm, this kind of play raises their confidence, and develops their brain's potential to deal with what life throws at them. This resilience and flexibility will have lifelong benefits – it can actually keep them safer in the long run.

We can support our children by:

- **Questioning and confronting the 'conker banning' culture** – is it really necessary?
- **Remembering that accidents happen** – it is impossible to make our children totally safe – and accidents can sometimes teach children at first hand how to take care of themselves.
- **Enabling and supporting our children to make their own judgments** about whether they are capable of doing something, or whether they are safe. Trusting their judgment unless the consequences may be truly life-threatening.
- **Thinking before saying no** – children seek out wobbly and challenging things to do because they need to. We need to use our judgment, and weigh up whether it is really crucial to say no or whether we are saying no out of habit.
- **Taking a common sense approach** – we can do our children harm by being overcautious or making them scared of situations or people. They need to know how to keep themselves safe but they also need to have the confidence to make their own way in the world.
- **Asking ourselves, is the benefit to children of challenging and sometimes scary play (to them and us!) greater than the potential for harm.**
- **Remembering that children can be at greater risk within their own home** – accident statistics show that they are more likely to be injured in the home than outside at the playground or in the woods.



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