



Children's Play Policy

Policy Statement:

Pennant Hills Before and After School Care Service believes in a coherent, consistent and balanced approach to the management of risk, to ensure greater clarity of understanding around children's play. In doing so, the policy may present some challenges to the existing risk averse nature of our society which can limit children's play experiences. We recognise that childhood is full of new experiences, which usually involves some degree of risk taking, whether it is physical or emotional.

Our service supports children in their continuous process of trial and error with the potential for achievement. With consideration, there may be unavoidable incidents that occur from time to time. To minimise incidents, staff actively supervise and are required to implement focused attention and intentional observation of children throughout children's play. Without play opportunities that involve some element of risk and challenge, children may seek it elsewhere. When planning and providing play opportunities, staff focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits for children's wellbeing and development.

Definitions:

Play: The engagement of activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than for any set purpose.

Risk Management: The systematic process of identifying, assessing, and controlling potential hazards to ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of children, staff, and families, involving proactive strategies to prevent harm, manage emergencies, and sometimes balancing risk with learning opportunities like "risky play".

Risk-Benefit Assessment: The process of balancing potential dangers with developmental advantages, moving beyond simple hazard removal to embrace challenging play that builds confidence, resilience, and self-regulation in children.

Reasonable Controls: Comprehensive systems for safety, balancing risk with development, and continuous improvement, focusing on adequate supervision, robust risk assessments (for play,

excursions, sleep), staff training, strict hygiene/cleaning, clear policies (child protection, incident management), and responsive reporting, ensuring a safe, nurturing environment while allowing for essential, challenging play.

Considerations:

- Education and Care Services National Regulations:
 - Regulation 155: Interactions with children
 - Regulation 156 Relationships in groups
 - Regulation 103 Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair)
- Education and Care Services National Law:
 - Section 165 Offence to inadequately supervise children.
 - Section 167 Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards.
- National Quality Framework
 - Quality Area 3 Physical environment
 - Element 2.2.1, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard
- My Time Our Place Framework
- Health and Safety Executive and the Play Safety Statement – *Children’s Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach*
- ACECQA Guidelines

Policy:

This policy is supported by the high-level statement produced by the Health and Safety Executive and the Play Safety – *Children’s Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach*.

Risk Management Systems:

Staff will ensure risk management is used to refer to all elements involved in the management of risk. Staff will have knowledge of all play risk-benefit assessments and also incorporate further strategies, awareness and supervision in the broad range of settings at the service.

Duty of Care:

Staff have a responsibility to reduce the amount of harm or injury and to keep children safe from harm whilst they are attending our service. Throughout play, uncertain outcomes may arise from time to time. We aim to eliminate hazards in the environment that may impact children's safety whilst actively participating in their own personal development of health, wellbeing and resilience.

Active Supervision:

Staff must be alert and aware of risks, hazards and the potential for accidents and injury, not only in their immediate location but also throughout the service. We have children of different ages and abilities that will need different levels of supervision. Younger children will require closer supervision, where for older children, it is important to balance the need for close supervision with respect for their age and developing independence.

Active supervision includes:

- Scanning or regularly looking around the area to observe all children in the environment. Educators who are aware of the environment can identify appropriate positions for maximum vision of children. Educators should avoid standing with their backs to children and undertaking tasks that will distract them from supervising children.
- Close observation of children to provide support and to extend children's play experiences. Educators who closely observe children and are attuned to their needs and interests can recognise when children wish to play without adult involvement.
- Flexible supervision arrangements to allow for close supervision of smaller groups engaging in riskier activities (e.g. use of tools).

Risk-Benefit Assessments:

Risk-benefit assessments are documents that outline the potential risks of an area or activity, the potential for harm (using a risk matrix) and steps to ensure risk is minimised, while also weighing these against potential benefits. Staff assess and make decisions about what is reasonable, and the probability of children's engagement and involvement will be made, using a risk-benefit approach. They will consider the potential benefits afforded by an opportunity alongside any potential negative outcomes and make a judgement about whether the potential harm is outweighed by the benefits.

For the purpose of risk-benefit assessments, staff understand that benefits can be physical, emotional, social, or environmental (and can also be a combination of all of these). That risk of injury can be identified by considering the likelihood of any potential injury occurring together with the potential severity of that injury.

Reasonable Controls:

During the risk-benefit process staff understand it may be necessary to identify control measures in order to reduce risk of injury to an acceptable level. The control measures that can reasonably be implemented will depend on the resources available. The value of any potential control measures must be justified by being proportional to the risks involved. Prior to the implementation of control measures, consideration should also be given to any potentially negative impacts that may result before facilitating play opportunities for children.

Managing Expectations:

Our service is operated on school grounds, and it is important to have the support of the school Principal and teaching staff. Staff will engage with the school to manage expectations in terms of children's play, recognising that some play may not be consistent with that permitted during school time. Parents and care givers have expectations in terms of the safety of their children and may prefer not to have their child participate in risky play. This will be respected, and service staff will engage with families to help promote the approach of the centre. Any incidents or injuries will be reported according to the appropriate processes, including informing the Parent Management Committee. This policy will be reviewed by the centre management and the Parent Management Committee following any serious incidents or injuries.

Version	Action	Date
V.1	Original endorsement	10 th September 2021
V.2	Definitions added	23 rd January 2026
V.2	Approval by PMC	18 th February 2026