

How to encourage your kids to push (the right) boundaries

2015-07-29
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As we learned in the ParticipACTION Report Card and Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play, active outdoor play—with its risks—is essential for healthy childhood development. It seems that society’s attitudes towards helicopter parenting and the need to get out of kids’ way and let them play may be shifting. But believing in the value of risky play and actually letting your kids take risks are two different things.

Intellectually, people can understand that overprotecting kids might actually cause them longer-term harm, that supervising kids too closely puts us in danger of raising couch potatoes, but it’s still really hard to stop yourself from yelling “be careful” as they take off running.

Just as we have to let our kids ease into risky activities, according to their confidence and competence, we have to let ourselves, as parents, ease into some of the ideas of what we should and shouldn’t let our kids do. Risky play is never about letting your child play unsupervised at the pool, or ride a bike without a helmet. Here is how [the research](#) defines the different categories of risky play. Once you start to understand and identify the right types of risks, you might find yourself recognizing, allowing—and even encouraging—your child to test boundaries, explore and experiment with some risk:

1. **Great heights.** This includes climbing or jumping down from surfaces, balancing or playing on high objects, whether it be a tree limb or playground equipment, and hanging or swinging at great heights.
2. **High speed.** Riding, sliding, rolling or running at a quick or uncontrolled pace.
3. **Dangerous tools.** Whittling, sawing, tying or chopping using knives, axes, sharp sticks, ropes, hammers or nails.
4. **Dangerous elements.** Playing near rocks, a fire pit, a pond, lake or cliffs.
5. **Rough-and-tumble play.** Wrestling, play fighting or fencing with other children or parents.
6. **Disappear/get lost.** Exploring alone, playing alone in unfamiliar environments, letting children roam, hide away from larger groups or play unsupervised.

If this list makes you hyperventilate, you're not alone. We all want our kids to grow up healthy and happy, and nobody wants their child to be injured or hurt. But, if we let our kids explore and expose them to these risks, in bite-sized, reasonable and age-appropriate ways, they may actually be safer for it.

ParticipACTION Report Card Risky Play

- *Wanna play? Check out some of our fun family programs such as FAN Club on our website: <http://www.ierha.ca/default.aspx?cid=6131&lang=1>*
- *You can read more about promoting active lifestyles at home, at school and at work on the ParticipACTION Blog: [PepTalk](#)*