play
safety
forum

Risk-Benefit Assessment Form

Worked Example

Introduction

The Play Safety Forum, formed in 1993, exists to consider and promote the wellbeing of children and young people through ensuring a balance between safety, risk and challenge in respect of play and leisure provision.

*Managing Risk in Play Provision: S*hows how play providers can develop an approach to risk management that takes into account the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences, as well as the risks. It starts from the position that, while outside expertise and advice are valuable, the ultimate responsibility for making decisions rests with the provider.

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Risk-Benefit Assessment Form

Purpose and scope of form

This form is designed to support a balanced approach to risk management using the process of risk-benefit assessment (RBA). It is aimed at those involved in providing play opportunities in a range of contexts, including play areas, public parks, green spaces, out-of-school childcare settings, playwork settings, schools and early years services. It builds on the guidance document *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide* (2nd edition), published in 2013 by the Play Safety Forum with Play England, Play Wales, Play Scotland and PlayBoard Northern Ireland. See this publication for a fuller discussion of the principles and approach set out here.

Those using this form should focus on the significant risks that the play provision gives rise to The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines significant risks as those that go beyond everyday life and that "are capable of creating a real risk to health and safety which any reasonable person would appreciate and would take steps to guard against."

Why risk-benefit assessment?

Risk management in play contexts is different from workplace or factory contexts in one crucial respect. In play provision, a degree of risk is often beneficial, if not essential. Children and young people enjoy challenging, adventurous play opportunities where they can test themselves and extend their abilities. Giving children the chance to encounter hazards and take risks provides other benefits, such as the chance to learn how to assess and manage these and similar risks for themselves. Hence accidents and injuries are not necessarily a sign of problems, because of the value of such experiences in children's learning. Unlike conventional risk assessment, RBA takes account of benefits by bringing together consideration of risks and benefits when deciding on appropriate responses.

Judgements about the balance between risks and benefits can be complicated. They involve many factors, and are often partly subjective. For example, children may be unpredictable in their play, and have widely varying interests and competences; different providers may have different aims, goals and values, which may be expressed in widely varying approaches; and the

context of a site, and the level and style of supervision, are important local factors. Guidance such as play equipment standards help to set reference points, but do not provide an absolute answer, nor do they take into account local circumstances.

Some play environments and structures are complex, and go beyond everyday experience. Judgements about structural stability, water hygiene, head traps or structures built into trees, for instance, may require some technical knowledge and specialist expertise. However, other cases will not involve such expertise: decisions can be based on everyday experience, skills and knowledge. Different situations will require different types and levels of expertise, and this form is designed to reflect this.

Risk-Benefit Assessment in Practice

Incorporating RBA into your risk management system is a significant step. It may involve changes in principles, procedures and practice at many levels, including thinking and understanding about children and their play and development, overall values and direction, service management, staff and site supervision, and ongoing maintenance and inspection procedures. Some kind of organisational review or training may be helpful in ensuring that considerations of the benefits of risk in children's play are properly understood and implemented. When first introducing the form, some piloting and group/team discussion is likely to be useful.

Structure of form

Before the form, there is a table for recording the details of the risk-benefit assessment. The form is split into two parts, to reflect the different levels of expertise that may be involved. The main form sets out the factors to be addressed in any overall RBA. The supplementary form asks about the knowledge and/or specialist expertise that may – or may not - be needed when carrying out a particular RBA. A glossary at the end gives brief definitions of some of the key terms. This form is available in two formats: Word 2007 (with a blank form) and pdf (with a worked example) at

www.playengland.org.uk

www.playscotland.org

www.playwales.org.uk

www.playboard.org

This form is not set in stone: users may find it useful to make amendments or adaptations.

Overview of Risk-Benefit Assessment

Project/ proposal name:	Tree swing for Wonderful Park, Wonderful Borough Council		
Type of assessment *(tick one box)*:	*Designer*	✔	
	Provider/manager		
	Post-installation		
	Monitoring		
Assessor:	*Name*	A. Mazing Designer	
	Position	Landscape Architect	
	Date		
Description and location of facility, feature, activity or equipment:			
	Tree swing fitted to oak tree in wooded area of park		
Date to review risk-benefit assessment:			
	By client, once installed		
Signature of senior worker/manager:			

Main Form: Risk-benefit assessment

Benefits:	• Pleasure and fun • Physical play and reflective opportunities • Maximised rotational possibilities and therefore good potential for some unpredictability and therefore challenge • Development of self-confidence and well-being • Learning through experience: accidents from which one might learn • Swing users encounter conditions similar to those with other self-built tree swings – experience that will be useful if/when they play on them or make their own • Engagement with natural environment and natural elements • Potential for incorporation into imaginative games where woodlands are the play context, e.g. Tarzan • Swinging in the trees • Mixing between different age ranges.
Risks (*taking into account any technical information identified in the supplementary form below)*:	**EQUIPMENT FAILURE** **Swing fitting fails due to wear** Wear should be detectable through regular internal inspection as per proposed maintenance schedule attached **Swing fitting fails due to vandalism** This is the same as for a standard swing. The swing has a strong steel chain, cable and fitting which would require concerted effort with a hacksaw to cut. **PART OF TREE BREAKS** **The branch or support could collapse** There is some risk of minor injuries e.g. bruises, scrapes and possible long bone fractures. These would largely be incurred by falling from the swing onto the ground. A pendulum seat will be used which will deter multiple users from using the swing simultaneously thus reducing unpredictability. The tree has been checked by an arboriculturist and considered fit for purpose (see arboriculturalist's report [not included here]). All fittings between the two shackles (No. 5 on specification drawing) will carry certification for Safe Working Loads.

	The tree/branch could become damaged with wear There is a rubber protector mat between all points of wear and the tree. The design of the fixing (see specification drawing) will minimise wear on the tree. The fixing is designed with an additional bracing to the tree crown providing a secondary bearing in the unlikely event of the branch giving way. **OTHER FALLS OR COLLISIONS** **One could fall onto something hard/absence of Impact Absorbent Surfacing (IAS)** Possibility of head injury upon falling, The current surface is patchy grass and leaf litter. There are no protruding tree roots or stones. It is very unlikely that the fall height exceeds 1.4m. If the surface is kept clear of protrusions then the risk is considered to be low. Note wide general prevalence of children and teenagers creating own rope swings over similar surfaces and generally low risk of this activity. **Collision with obstacles** The adjacent tree stump should be felled and the nearby slide relocated off another platform. **Risk of crashing into the tree or support** It may be possible to hit the supporting tree but this is easily seen and will likely be used for pushing against with feet. **Collision with other person** There are no obstructions to the visibility of swing users and other users. **OTHER RISKS** **Risk of hanging** There is very little risk from hanging as the swing is suspended on sleeved chain and therefore very difficult to knot or loop.
Local factors:	• Mature woodland setting with implicit adventurous play e.g. tree climbing • Evidence of persistent self-build rope swings on tree that is now too weak to support it • Existing swings have a limited challenge and are suspended from a relatively low frame • Only a small budget exists for increasing the play offer at this site • There is a need for more challenging opportunities on this site

	• More play offers in this lower section of the space will invite greater use and help this area not to become a ghetto • Local housing and road nearby to call for help.
Precedents &/or comparisons:	• Many examples, recorded and in our own experience, of children and teenagers creating rope swings attached to trees in unsupervised settings with little risk of significant injury • Forestry Commission guidance on “Rope swings, dens, tree houses and fires” • Scouting Movement • Go Ape facilities where risk, adventure and taking responsibility for oneself are core part of the experience.
Decision:	Proposed tree swing offers an acceptable level of risk. Go ahead with suitable site modifications and management arrangements (see below). Current 'natural' surface appropriate for setting. Using impact absorbency in the fall zone may reduce risk of injury. Note, however, wide general prevalence of children and teenagers creating own rope swings and generally low risk of this activity. (Excavation and loose fill is not possible in a root zone without damaging the tree or changing the level which would then need to be retained. Saver grass mats would be expensive and grass is unlikely to grow through. Matting would also decrease the charm of the woodland context and be likely to create trip hazards, especially over time.) Hence IAS not deemed necessary.
Actions taken:	The adjacent tree stump should be removed and slide relocated.
Ongoing management and monitoring:	• The swing and fixings should be “inspected” for the usual signs of wear as per proposed maintenance schedule after first month and second month and thereafter adjusted in light of experience • The tree should be inspected for damage by an arboriculturist annually and thereafter adjusted in light of experience • If an external inspection is required for the swing fixings, and as this is a non-standard item, this should

	be provided by a suitably experienced person and not inspected by someone whose main or only knowledge is of EN standards. • This document is a **Design Stage** risk-benefit assessment. It is possible that further issues come to light through the implementation of this feature and adjustments may be required. In addition it is recommended that a post-installation risk-benefit assessment is undertaken by the client.

Refer to the Glossary at the end of the document for an explanation of terms

Supplementary Form: Knowledge and/or specialist expertise needed (if any) for this risk-benefit assessment

Use this table to give information about any additional specialist or technical expertise that is felt to be necessary. In some circumstances, no such input will be needed. If this is the case, a suitable note such as ‘none applicable’ or ‘N/A’ should be made in the table (which should otherwise be left blank). In other circumstances, such as those involving bespoke structures or unusual sites, specialist input may be appropriate. Such expertise might, for example, cover the following topics: trees, structural engineering, rope specialisms, water, soil, EN standards and maintenance. In rare cases, other areas of expertise may also be needed. Ensure that relevant information is noted above in the main form.

Knowledge or specialism	Person providing the knowledge/ carrying out the assessment	Any checks carried out and actions proposed
	Mr Woody (Trees R Us)	Follow advice re: location and method of attachment to tree, as in arboriculturalist’s report [not included here]
	Ms Hemp (Ropes Ahoy)	Follow advice re: type of chain, shackles and methods of attachment (as above)

Glossary

Actions taken: This should state the actions taken as a result of the decision reached. The choices could include:

- None
- Introduce or increase monitoring of benefits and/or risks
- Introduce or increase supervision
- Book technical inspection
- Contact manufacturer to make modifications
- Introduce other measures to reduce risks
- Introduce additional features or activities that increase the level of risk and challenge or other benefits
- Meet with parents/users to raise awareness of approach to risk and benefit
- Remove facility/structure, or suspend activity

Benefits: the specific, positive things that children and young people gain through the play opportunities that are under assessment (social, physical, emotional, educational, psychological, etc.).

Decision: this is the assessor's conclusion following a risk-benefit assessment. The choices could include:

- Proceed/continue with no adjustments to the play environment or working practices and continue to monitor
- Proceed/continue with some specific adjustments to the play environment or working practices while continuing to monitor
- Cease use of the play environment until work can be carried out/further assessments can be made

Local factors: any relevant issues that are specific to the setting being assessed (for example, proximity to housing, characteristics of local residents and typical users, nature of supervision, access to the site, size of the site, proximity to busy roads or other hazards, etc.). Any relevant supporting policies and strategies should also be mentioned here.

Ongoing monitoring and management: State here any future actions that may need to be taken. These could include:

- Maintenance schedules
- Inspection regimes
- Reviews of accident records, injuries or other outcomes
- User feedback exercises

Precedents and/or comparisons: similar equipment, environments, loose parts or potential situations where play is taking place either locally or elsewhere. This section is particularly helpful in relation to unusual, innovative, unconventional or novel initiatives, to help to justify departures from standard approaches. It may be left blank in the case of straightforward projects.

Risk-benefit assessment (RBA): a tool to aid risk management that explicitly brings together considerations of risks and benefits in a single judgement.

Risks: in general use, the word 'risk' refers to the probability, likelihood or chance of an adverse outcome. In risk management contexts, the word tends to include a measure of the seriousness of the outcome, as well as its probability. HSE defines risk as the chance that "somebody could be harmed by [a hazard] together with an indication of how serious the harm could be."

Other language used when assessing risks and benefits for play

Hazards: hazards are potential sources of harm. The HSE defines a hazard as "anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer, etc." There is no action and no object that may not be hazardous in certain circumstances. It is impractical to treat all potential hazards with the same degree of seriousness. In managing risk, judgements need to be made about:

- Which risks and hazards need to be modified or removed
- Which risks and hazards might be acceptable or desirable, because of their benefits to children and young people
- What, if anything, is to be done about risks and hazards that have been identified.

Safe: 'safe' or 'safety' is perhaps the most commonly encountered term in debates about children and risk, such as: "Is this playground/park/tree/public square safe?" There is no simple answer to questions like this, because the word 'safe' means different things to different people (see *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation* guide, p. 31).