



#TeamWilder Educator Toolkit: Assessing and Managing Risk

Risk vs. benefit – it's a balancing act!

Outdoor lessons which allow children to connect to nature using all of their senses or take action for nature on a site that they have a special connection with, can provide incredibly powerful learning experiences. It's important, of course, that both adults and children understand any risks associated with the activity they're undertaking and feel confident about how to stay safe. Equally, if we have a completely risk-averse mindset, this can over-emphasise safety to the detriment of children's learning opportunities and social development.

When it comes to leading sessions out in nature there is a requirement under the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999*, as with any activity, to carry out a "suitable and sufficient assessment" of the risks associated with a site or activity, and to act accordingly.

The phrase "suitable and sufficient" recognises that the nature and scope of the assessment depends upon circumstances – there isn't one right way to assess risk and record the measures taken to minimise dangers. Nor is there an any overriding HSE or other legal requirement to eliminate risk from an activity altogether. Rather, good risk management is about ensuring you have assessed what the risks involved in an activity are and that you've put a plan in place to reduce these risks as much as possible *without losing the benefits of the activity*.

As the HSE states on its website – "*sensible risk management is not about generating useless paperwork ...it is about providing overall benefit...by balancing benefits and risks*".

Involving children in managing risk.

Traditionally, we might evaluate the risks involved in an activity and then relay them to the children taking part ahead of starting the activity. Whilst this is fine as an approach, it can be far more effective, where possible, to involve the children in the assessment of risk from the outset.

Rather than being 'talked at' about dangers, involving them in working out the dangers for themselves can:

- Create a better understanding among pupils of the hazards and benefits of an activity.
- Lead to better engagement with the agreed risk control measures – children are more likely to follow rules if they are rules they've helped to create!
- Provide an opportunity for good teamworking and language-learning.
- Help you to spot things you might have missed!
- Be more fun than doing it on your own!



“Helping young people to experience and handle risk is part of preparing them for adult life and the world of work...part of the process should be about setting realistic expectations and making [children] aware that they are exposing themselves to risk – and that’s a good thing! Why? Because life itself is full of risks we cannot avoid. We all survive by learning how to deal with risk; and helping young people to experience risk and learn how to handle it is part of preparing them for adult life. If the next generation enter the workplace having been protected from all risk they will not be so much risk averse as completely risk naive”

- Judith Hackitt CBE, Chair, HSE

Reassurance – myth busting!

Myth One: “School trips/outdoor activities are dangerous”

If we add up all the pupils taking part in adventure/outdoor activities with schools it equates to around 7-10million days a year of ‘adventure/outdoor’ activity – with only 1 death per year on average directly related to this activity. Taking into account the amount of time spent participating in these activities, the likelihood of fatality is about equal with everyday life – i.e. on a typical school visit or outdoor activity, those taking part are at no greater risk of death than those back in the classroom.

Myth Two: “Teachers are at risk of prosecution if an accident happens”

If an educational lead takes reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the children in their care, it is highly unlikely that they would ever be held to be negligent in the event of an unforeseen accident.

“The benefits of outdoor education are far too important to forfeit, and by far outweigh the risks of an accident occurring. If teachers follow recognized safety procedures and guidance they have nothing to fear from the law.

David Bell, Former Chief Inspector of Schools, 2004

In other words – risk is not something to fear and run from but to embrace as a valuable learning opportunity for children. By encouraging them to face and assess risk we can not only support them to building their social skills, confidence & mental health, but we are also introducing them to an essential life skill.

Some key things to consider when assessing risk:

What are our obligations?

Our overall obligation, in relation to HSE directives, is to assess a site and/or activity and evaluate the benefit it will offer in balance with any risks it entails. We are not expected to eradicate risk from a site/activity, but rather to minimise risks “where possible and appropriate to do so” and to



“document [our] process” (see below for advice on how to go about this). Where there is benefit to an element of risk being part of the activity, this is perfectly acceptable – so long as we have recognised this and put in place a plan to manage this risk appropriately.

The 5 key steps to assessing and managing risk are:

- Step 1** – Identify the hazard
- Step 2** – Decide who might be harmed and how
- Step 3** – Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
- Step 4** - Record your findings and implement them
- Step 5** – Review your assessment and update if necessary

What should our supervision ratios be?

When assessing the risk involved in an activity, it’s important to consider how to ensure all children within a group can be appropriately supervised – this may require additional adult co-leaders, depending on the size of your group.

Your ratios of adults (whether parents/guardians, staff, or registered volunteers) to children will need to be appropriate to the activity, age group and capability of the children. Supervision ratios should be stated in the risk assessment - DfE guidance for ratios is given below. When planning any outdoor activity or event, we recommend planning for a **minimum of 2 adults** to be present at all times, and more if working with tools.

Age	Supervision Ratio
Under 3 yrs old	1 adult : 2 children
3 – 5 yrs old	1:4
6 – 9 yrs old	1:5
10 – 18 yrs old	1:10
Open-access play (age 5 - 8)	1:13
Using tools	1:5
High risk implements	1:1

High risk implements can include: all types of saws, bill hooks, bushcraft and kitchen knives, sharp edged swinging tools and electrical equipment.

We would recommend that the roles and responsibilities for all adults in attendance should be made clear ahead of the session, particularly with regard to accident and emergency procedures and expectations around behaviour management.

It’s also important that all activities are supervised by appropriately trained people - if necessary, arrange H&S training for staff/volunteers before they help to lead/supervise outdoor sessions.



What else should I consider?

Here are some further recommendations to help you organise a safe activity:

- Staff/Leaders should be trained in the use of any tools provided.
- A comprehensive tool talk should be given to any volunteers or persons unfamiliar with any tools being used, ensuring everyone is conversant and confident with how to use them safely before the session begins. This talk should cover site safety, safe carrying of tools, safe and proper use and storage of tools during the activity, and accident procedures.
- Ensure appropriate and well-stocked/checked first aid kits are available, and at least one adult leader/supervisor has received up-to-date first aid training.
- All adult leaders/supervisors should have mobile phones & share contact numbers if the group will be splitting up at any point.
- Take regular breaks in the activity to avoid tiredness.
- All accident/incidents must be reported/recorded using an agreed reporting form/system.

Documenting your risk management process.

As mentioned above, a key part of meeting our obligations in relation to managing risk is to document our assessment process. So, how should we best to go about this?

Risk Assessments vs Risk Benefit Analysis:

Both of these methods can be effective ways of documenting our assessment process and creating an essential audit trail. At first glance the difference between the two seems quite subtle, but in practice it can have a big impact on the mindset of the person assessing and, if they're involved in the assessment process (as we recommend they should be where possible), the children participating in the activity.

Risk Assessment Pros	Risk Assessment Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As the more traditional method of measuring risk, these are generally used and recognised across different sectors and settings and provide an assessment system that most session leaders or external inspectors would be familiar with• If you work for a large organisation which undertakes a lot of different activities, a traditional risk assessment template can provide an effective uniform system within which to assess these diverse types of activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditional risk assessments tend to be based on systems initially developed in industrial/commercial settings, where the issues and priorities can be quite different to an outdoor learning context – for example, in a factory or classroom setting, exposing people to risk is, generally, always undesirable, but contrast, in an outdoor learning context a degree of risk/challenge is often of intrinsic worth to the activity and the learning experience.



Risk Benefit Analysis Pros

- A Risk Benefit Analysis **STARTS** by identifying the benefits and objectives, then reviews risks & possible responses to these, before reaching judgement on measures that will be taken. As such they foreground the values that an activity has for the children/young people taking part, rather than just homing in on dangers – therefore they empower educators; enabling them to clearly state what their pupils will miss out on if they don't go outdoors!
- RBAs bring together in a single procedure assessment of both risks and benefits, in doing so allowing a focus on making judgements & identifying measures that manage risks, **while securing benefits**. Typical risk assessments can seem overwhelming because they focus purely on everything that could go wrong. The risk benefit assessment still covers those risks but also states the benefits of being in the outdoor environment. When tallied against the benefits, the risks of such learning seem smaller and manageable, without taking away the learning intention. This method of risk assessing can also instil confidence and passion in those more reluctant members of staff, as the benefits of going outdoors are clearly stated.
- A risk-benefit analysis approach is recognised by the HSE as forming part of the risk management process, as required by H&S regulations.
- RBAs don't use a scoring system as this can be confusing and difficult to apply consistently in play and learning contexts. Instead, they favour a narrative approach that encourages those carrying out assessment to state the factors they've considered & judgements they've reached.

Risk Benefit Analysis Cons

- Not all organisations will recognise the RBA format, and some may insist on traditional risk assessments being completed instead – though if this is the case we would encourage you to raise this as an opportunity for positive change!



Example Risk Assessment

Likelihood x Severity Matrix

	Slight harm	Harmful	Very harmful
Unlikely	Trivial	Slight	Moderate
Likely	Slight	Moderate	Substantial
Very likely	Moderate	Substantial	Intolerable

Remember, this pre-entered text is simply for illustration. You should always create your own Risk Assessment relevant to your circumstances.

What are you risk assessing?

Assessor Name:	Job title / role:	Line manager check:
Date of assessment:	Date for revision:	Other related assessments:
Activity / Task:	Date of task:	
Additional risk factors to add and consider on the day: <i>(e.g., the weather or any areas which have been designated out of bounds since you completed your assessment)</i>		
Name of First Aider/s: Level of First Aid training acquired and date received: First Aid kit requirements: Required ratio of adult leaders to child participants:		



Assessing the Risks

Hazard If children or vulnerable adults are present, remember to include safeguarding risks.	Who is affected and how many people? e.g. staff, volunteers, members of the public	Typical outcome e.g. minor injury, serious injury, death	How will the risk be controlled? Who will control the risk? How will the control measure be communicated?	Remaining Risk Level e.g. likely x harmful = moderate (using the Likelihood / Severity matrix above)
Slips, trips and falls	5 x staff 25 x child participants 2 x parent helpers	Minor injuries through serious injuries	John Smith to carry out pre-event site inspection and ensure any dangerous areas are taped off and avoided. Ahead of activity, Jane Doe to ensure children have suitable footwear and clothing inc work boots/wellies if required. At the beginning of the session, John Smith (group leader) to do a site walk around with children to point out any potential problem areas i.e uneven surfaces, steps etc.	Harmful x Unlikely = Slight
Extreme weather conditions	5 x staff 25 x child participants 2 x parent helpers	Hypothermia/Sunburn etc	John Smith to check weather forecast night before activity and decide what action to be taken if weather is forecast as especially hot, icy, snow, heavy rain, flooding, high winds etc - cancel activity if necessary. If it is very cold, Jane Doe to ensure children are provided with warm clothing. Waterproof clothing to be provided for any activities taking place in the rain. Non-allergenic sun cream should be made available on bright days and children advised to wear long sleeves and trousers and hats.	Slight Harm x Likely = Slight
Injury from handling timber/construction materials				



Carrying materials/unusual loads				
Injury from repetitive bending/kneeling during construction				
Use of hand tools e.g. hammers, saws, pliers				
Use of wheel barrows				
Handling nails/staples/screws				
Injury from handling plants, containers and associated resources				
Over-hanging branches				
Biological hazards, inc. toxic plants, tetanus from soil, insect bites, faecal material, Lyme disease (ticks), leptospirosis/Weil's disease, dog faeces etc.				
Safeguarding risks inc. abuse, grooming, abduction				



Example Risk-Benefit Analysis

Activity & Location:		Date written:	
Assessor:		Review date:	

Remember, this pre-entered text is simply for illustration. You should always create your own Risk-Benefit Analysis relevant to your circumstances.

Your overall risk rating – Low, medium or high – is based on your judgement about whether the **BENEFITS** of the activity or opportunity outweigh the **RISKS**.

ACTIVITY	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk rating: L/M/H
Using tools e.g. bow saws, loppers, secateurs...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools are a method for us to create things with, fix objects, and manage our outdoor spaces. It is important that we understand how tools are used safely from an early age to avoid injury and use them with best practice. Tool use promotes responsibility, builds confidence, and keeps us fit! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tool misuse throwing cuts and abrasions puncture wounds blisters 	Children, young people, staff, volunteers,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set your ground rules together as a group with your guidance. Use visual aids for younger people. Introduce tools to the group with a tool talk. Name and show the parts of the tool and what their role is. Then demonstrate how to use it correctly. Remember to wear a glove on your non-tool hand (helper hand). Demonstrate how to move with the tool and what to do with it when it is not in use. Ask the group to repeat the tool talk with a partner. Different tools, require different levels of supervision. Sheath knives, bow saws should be used on a 1:1 basis, peelers and palm drills can be used on a 1:2 basis. Always be an arm length and a tool length away. Ensure tools are counted in and out and placed back in the designated tool storage area when finished with. Never cut anything that is above head height. 	Medium



<p>Creating a wildlife pond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a space that welcomes wildlife into an area you can share brings us joy and opportunities to learn. • Creating something brings us a sense of achievement and a long- term project. • Fantastic boost for physical and mental wellbeing • Opportunities to learn about food webs, ecosystems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crushing injuries • cuts and abrasions • lacerations • splinters • eye injuries • slips, trips, falls 	<p>Children, young people, staff, volunteers,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set your ground rules together as a group with your guidance. Use visual aids for younger people. • Introduce the task, then the tools you are using e.g spade, wheelbarrows by doing a thorough tool talk. Ask the group to repeat the tool talk with a partner. • Ensure tools are junior size where appropriate e.g. spades and forks. • Shorter tasks, or rotating individuals around tasks will reduce RSI and mean that everyone will get to do their fair share of the tasks. • Space out when working with tools and consider the environment tools are being used in e.g. overgrown areas. • Secure pond area with a fence as a safety measure. 	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Litter picking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Litter picking is great exercise, you can walk for ages and not realize how far you've gone. • Litter picking provides a great opportunity to really make a difference in an area. • Opportunity to talk about how litter affects the environment. • Curriculum links with design technology - how packaging is made, material properties. Mathematics – can make tallies and graphs to show how much litter is made of different materials and present that information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slips, trips, falls • eye injuries • cuts and abrasions • hazardous plants • getting lost • Infection 	<p>Children, young people, staff, volunteers,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set your ground rules together as a group with your guidance. Use visual aids for younger people. • Introduce the task and do a tool talk for the litter picker. • Set boundaries for areas that need litter picking. • If something isn't within reach, leave it. • Sharps should be disposed of in a specialist sharps container. • Wear gloves and sturdy boots. 	<p>Low</p>



Creating a bug hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity brings in some creativity to the sessions. • Can help students realize the potential of natural materials and stretch their imaginations. • Can link to design technology and useful materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splinters • Slips, trips and falls • Hazardous plants 	Staff, children, volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set your ground rules together as a group with your guidance. Use visual aids for younger people. • Wear gloves when handling raw materials. Wear a glove on your helper hand when using tools. • Introduce any tools with a tool talk. • Model this practice throughout the task. • Ensure there is a clear, and spacious work area. 	Low
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Further Support:

Tim Gill is recognised as a leader in developing outdoor learning theory and practice; some of his key publications can be downloaded for free:

- www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Nothing-Ventured.pdf
- timrgill.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/no-fear-19-12-07.pdf

Online and in-person CPD courses about managing risk outdoors are available via a range of different organisations. We would recommend contacting the Institute for Outdoor Learning as a starting point at www.outdoor-learning.org/Events/IOL-Accredited-CPD-and-Training-Courses

Further guidance including more example risk assessments can be found at:

- The Institute for Outdoor Learning www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/Risk-and-Benefit-in-Outdoor-Learning
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) www.hse.gov.uk
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) www.rospace.co.uk
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/contents/made
- Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid/legislation.htm

