

# INCLUSION STRATEGIES & TOOLS

## RISKY PLAY

Risky play includes exciting, age-appropriate activities that involve some level of risk. It looks different for each child depending on their age, interests, and comfort level. Common examples in childcare include:



**Climbing**



**Hide and Seek**



**Running Fast**



**Big Loose Parts**



**Rough-and-Tumble Play**

Risky play allows children to test their limits, build confidence, and learn about safety in real ways.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Physical Skills: Climbing, running, and balancing help build strength, coordination, and confidence.

Thinking Skills: Children learn to judge risk, solve problems, and make decisions.

Emotional Growth: Overcoming challenges builds resilience and independence.

Social Development: Group risky play supports cooperation, communication, and empathy.

## HOW TO SUPPORT RISKY PLAY

- Observe closely without stepping in too soon.
- Stay present and responsive to provide support as needed (e.g., reminder to check for stability before climbing).
- Use language that supports awareness. Help the child check in with their body and the play. Instead of “Be careful!” use phrases like:

“Do you see your friends near by / how high you are?”

“Do you feel stable on that log?”

“Notice how these rocks are slippery / sharp this tool is?”

“How will you get down / go up / get across?”

“What’s your plan if you jump on that bolder / dig that hole?”

“Are you feeling scared / excited / secure?”

## BALANCE CHALLENGE & LIMITS

Accept that risk is part of learning, and risks can be mitigated. For example:

Risky Play	How to Support
Climbing	Teach strong/secure grips and watch from nearby
Playing on ice	Add sand or teach how to move carefully
Rough-and-tumble play	Set space rules and check in often
Using big loose parts (e.g., tires or crates)	Support secure stacking and lifting

**The goal isn’t to eliminate risk but to keep children as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.**

## TIPS

- Pause before stepping in. Give children time to assess and respond.
- Reflect on your own comfort with risk. Everyone’s risk tolerance is different.
- Talk with children about what they’re doing and what they’re noticing.
- Reflect and plan. Consider risky play needs during programming and setup.
- Be intentional. Risky play should be supported and thoughtfully supervised.

**Incorporating risky play into early learning supports well-rounded development, helping children grow into confident, capable problem-solvers who know how to navigate risk independently.**