

Life is fraught with danger.

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Life is fraught with danger. School playgrounds should be too. The primary school encouraging children to play with saws and bricks deserves applause – shielding kids from risk helps no one. Risk is a part of life, and schools are very much in the business of preparing children for life – not just as scholars but as human beings, citizens and custodians of the world. So news that a primary school in Essex has introduced bricks and saws into its playground to help children understand risk should be celebrated, not condemned.

(Tom Bennett is a teacher, and the Department for Education's independent adviser on behaviour in schools. He is also the founder of researchED, a teacher-led organisation working to improve the use of evidence in education)

On the surface there is perhaps much to feel anxious about. But a moment's reflection is enough to realise that children are frequently exposed to worse things on the way to school, and if a slide and a swing are the greatest hazard our children ever face as they grow up, then I can only assume they are raised in an isolation tank.

No amount of bubble wrap can cushion the fact that the world is perilous. The question is, how do we best equip children to deal with it? The easy answer – the wrong answer – is to attempt the impossible and to hide them, as the Buddha's father is said to have tried, from death and disease. Risk is everywhere.

Some people blame health and safety rules for creating playgrounds devoid of opportunities to learn from adversity: a curious attitude towards one of our greatest but most maligned social innovations – risk management. Although to many it's a dreary administrative chore, it is also responsible for countless lives saved, limbs gone unharmed and disasters averted. We mock it at our peril. Some regulations may seem petty, but set that against the benefits of prohibitions and standards that keep us upright and breathing.

In reality, there are few reasons for schools not to help children experience managed risk, and the fear of falling foul of some imagined regulation is often greater than the actual restriction. Of course there is a paradox: we want children to be as safe as possible, but avoiding risk simply makes us more likely to walk into calamity when we encounter it. Better to teach children to swim than to hope they never fall into a river. Children therefore need to be exposed to risks. We immunise them against calamity by acclimatising them to a hazardous world rather than locking them in towers. We could even see risk as a portal to opportunity and possibility instead of a hazard.

Playgrounds already contain sharp corners and hard surfaces; rain creates bogs in every park. I'd much rather teach children not to put their hands in a blender than tell them to fear it. The alternative is to create children who dare to do nothing and are terrified of everything. I applaud any school that teaches children to manage risk, to view life as springboard rather than a deathtrap. It is hard to see how a school could do more to adequately train children to deal with the slings and mud pits of outrageous fortune. Parents – children's fiercest safeguarders – have praised the school. A local councillor has expressed approval for it. My hope is that the school isn't pilloried by witless controversialists addicted to outrage. That's a risk far harder to manage.

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