

How do parental attitudes toward risk and injury relate to children's physical activity?

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Introduction



Children can benefit from adventurous play.

It can build independence, resilience, and emotional regulation skills, as well as contribute to mental well-being. Furthermore, these activities are often vigorous and can substantially increase children's moderate-to-vigorous levels of physical activity (MVPA).

In this brief, we highlight key results from an article published in 2024 that investigates the relationship between parent attitudes to risk and injury*, and their elementary school-aged child's daily adventurous play and MVPA in Australia.

The study draws from a sample of 645 Australian parents or guardians who completed an online survey comprising validated measures investigating children's physical activity, active play, and adventurous play, and their attitudes towards risk and injury.

For example, parents were asked about the average daily time their child spent engaged in active play, with provided examples illustrating various types of activities and settings, such as climbing high or jumping off elevated surfaces.

This brief aims to offer valuable information for practitioners and policy makers who are interested in designing interventions to enhance children's opportunities for adventurous play and physical activity outdoors.

Key messages

Overall, parents were positive about children's engagement with risk. However, the authors found that:

- Children with parents who tolerate risk in play are more likely to meet the MVPA guideline of 60 minutes daily and spend more time playing adventurously.
- In contrast, children with parents who have a more cautious attitude toward risk and injury are significantly less likely to play adventurously and meet the MVPA guideline of 60 minutes daily.
- When parents have a positive attitude towards risk, adventurous play increases among younger children, whereas parents with a lower tolerance for injury diminish the association between young children and meeting MVPA guidelines.

Mothers' and fathers' attitudes toward children's play and physical activity

The authors did detect a difference in parents' attitudes towards injuries, with mothers more concerned about play injuries than fathers. The fathers were generally more positive and tolerant towards injuries during play.

Also, having a younger parent, living in a major city, speaking English at home, and not being an only child can increase adventurous play.



Key take home message

Adjusting how parents perceive risks and injuries can be a key factor in promoting enjoyment and physical activity in children's play.

When striving to improve children's play experiences, future interventions should address the disparity between parents' beliefs and their actual parenting behavior; they might unintentionally hold things back more than they mean to.

The results from the study suggest the need to directly address parental concerns, particularly mothers, to explore how fears can be overcome and foster attitudes that empower parents to provide more opportunities for outdoor play.



Recommendations



Parents need support to provide opportunities for their children to engage with risk during playtime. Not only does it boost levels of MVPA but it also comes with a bunch of other known benefits such as skill development and mental well-being.

Addressing these issues in places like schools could be beneficial, promoting positive societal attitudes toward adventurous play.

The included study suggests that future interventions should:



Give parents practical tips on handling injury worries and supporting their kids' risk-taking during outdoor play.




Make playtime even better.



Tackle the gap between what parents think and how they parent, which may be more constraining than they realize or intend.

This brief is based on

Jerebine, A. G., Mohebbi, M., Lander, N., Eyre, E., Duncan, M., & Barnett, L. M. (2024). Playing it safe: The relationship between parent attitudes to risk and injury, and children's adventurous play and physical activity. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 70, Article 102536. Advance online publication.



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