

SAFETY: TAKE A LIFEGUARD APPROACH

A helpful way to think about keeping your children safe without getting in the way of their development is the three steps of the “lifeguard approach.”¹⁰

OBSERVE

OPEN ATTENTION

Express interest as you watch, but avoid interfering in their play. Trust that the child can manage the risks and challenges at hand.

CHECK IN

FOCUSED ATTENTION

If something more dangerous than an acceptable risk comes up, check in with the child to see if they are aware of the risk. Ask if they are comfortable managing the risk. If yes, go back to observing.

INTERVENE

ACTIVE PROTECTION

If the level of risk has become too high, it's time for the adult to get involved. Take steps to lower the risks. The goal is to help the child better understand risk when they are playing and give them the confidence to manage it.

Adapted from Dr. Haim Omer (2011)
& Dr. Mariana Brussoni



This content forms part of a larger booklet entitled “Why Outdoor Play Matters for Children: A practical guide for parents and caregivers”. To see the full booklet, and references, please go to recreationns.ca.



WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT

OBSERVE AND WAIT

Don't interrupt, only join when your child invites you.

BE A LEARNING ALLY

Let your child follow their play needs.

CHECK IN

Ask questions or offer tips.

17-SECOND STRATEGY

Give children time to problem solve on their own.

OFFER A SAFE PLACE FOR PLAY

Provide a safe play space or a secure base (your lap) to get started.

DON'T LET YOUR FEAR BECOME THEIR FEARS

The benefits of outdoor play, far outweigh the risks.

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