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## **Kids should take risks: new research**

**Author:** Gregory, Helen

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**Abstract (English):** HUNTER parents have been urged to lose the cotton wool and allow their children to engage in supervised risky play, such as access to open fire and scaling high climbing ...

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**Full text:** HUNTER parents have been urged to lose the cotton wool and allow their children to engage in supervised risky play, such as access to open fire and scaling high climbing equipment, after new research showed it can actually increase their safety awareness and help them better judge danger.

University of Newcastle conjoint associate professor Linda Newman and Dr Nicole Leggett completed the research with Adamstown Community Early Learning and Preschool director Kate Higginbottom as one of four projects in a collaborative practitioner study.

"We certainly did engage in risky play before the project and we always valued a risk based philosophy," Ms Higginbottom said. "But we wanted to understand how to provide validity to our parents and educators in terms of why we engage in risky play."

Dr Leggett held workshops for Ms Higginbottom's team about intentional teaching, which involves being thoughtful, informed and deliberate, instead of teaching by rote. "It's also about problem solving together," Ms Higginbottom said. "Before if a child was climbing to a great height we might direct them 'You need to put your foot here'. This was about working together to build their competence to assess risk and help them manage that risk, so 'Let's think about how we can get down'."

The school expanded its toolbox to include hacksaws and power drills, introduced skateboards and increased use of its 20 gallon firepit. "What we found after six weeks was there was a big decrease in the verbal and physical support they required," she said. "There was more sustained shared thinking between educators and children and between the children themselves.

"The children were challenging themselves a lot more and their language increased with words associated with risk assessment or management - they were starting to tell us 'My socks are sweaty - I should take them off when I'm climbing'."

She said children needed to experience appropriate risks to learn how to manage them. "We need to think not about what are the dangers if we do this now, but what if we don't do this now?"

"What are the dangers if they do go on a camp in the future and don't know how to manage risk around a fire?"

CREDIT: Helen Gregory

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