

PREPARING

YOUNG PEOPLE FOR A SAFER LIFE

The ability to assess and manage the risks of everyday life has now been acknowledged as an essential life skill and one that is necessary in order for people to live full and healthy lives. In order to develop this ability, young people need to be able to recognise hazard and understand what to do to reduce the risk of harm to themselves or others. Most importantly, they need to be able to transfer the knowledge and skills to any situation, in or out of school, at work, at home or when involved in leisure pursuits.

However, children do not always have the skills they need to be able to cope with the hazards they face, or to make informed decisions, about the risks that they choose to take.

Children need to learn that life is full of risk and understand that people must take responsibility for the consequences of their own actions. A nation of youngsters, shielded from any challenges for fear of injury, may well be unable to cope with risk when they become adults. Alternatively, some young people are likely to underestimate real dangers and consequently seek to gain their excitement by engaging in extremely hazardous pursuits.

Teachers have many opportunities to reinforce the safety message. They also have the skills necessary to deliver consistent messages about risk assessment. These messages delivered at the right developmental level throughout their time at school will result in young people being better equipped as adults to deal with situations of change and uncertainty, and thus bring benefits to society as a whole.



The Importance of Risk Education.

Every year there are about 3,800 deaths and 2.5 million hospital treatments for injuries caused by accidents in the home. 3,600 road deaths and 316,400 road related injuries. 400 to 500 deaths by drowning, a further 350 work related deaths and 1.6 million work related injuries.

We can all help to reduce the number of accidents by being more aware of their causes and adopting safer behaviours. Many young people nowadays, when asked their views about risky behaviour, think first of unlawful and anti-social activities such as trespass and vandalism, before giving thought to areas of known high-risks at home and on farms, roads and open stretches of water. Student responses to questions, indicate that they are more likely to give credence to high profile scare stories, e.g. about beef on the bone, than act to limit very much more significant risks within their control like smoking, drug-taking or U.V. exposure. These somewhat irrational responses indicate that young people need to become engaged with the whole business of managing the risks that confront them.

What might be included in a curriculum framework?

The curriculum should provide opportunities for pupils to gain knowledge, skills and understanding in coping with risk and uncertainty. In line with this belief the 'National Curriculum 2000', now carries specific references to the importance of risk education. These references can be found in the aims and values statement as well as in the new general teaching requirement for health and safety which applies to science, design and technology, art and design, physical education and information communication technology.

The statement requires that:

“When working with tools, equipment and materials in practical activities and in different environments, including those that are unfamiliar; pupils should be taught:

- about hazards, risk and risk control;
- to recognise hazards, assess consequent risk and take steps to control the risk to themselves, and others;
- to use information to assess the immediate and cumulative risks;
- to manage their environment to ensure the health and safety of themselves and others;
- to explain the steps they take to control risks.”

The purpose of teaching students to assess risks and to manage them is to help them to be able to make their own decisions about risk, and be able to:

- recognise the existence of hazards, risks and uncertainty in a range of contexts
- assess their own ability and the ability of others, to deal with different situations
- assess the consequences when dealing with hazards presented to themselves and to others (for example, within school, the environment, the home)
- seek advice from appropriate sources to minimise and manage risk;
- understand that rules and regulations exist in order to help define individual and collective responsibility.

How risk education could be delivered. Who would be involved?

With a little imagination, risk assessment can be interpreted in a way that can assist students to relate to every area of life, including the world of work.

By applying risk assessment to everyday learning activities students will gain a more realistic view of the world, their place within it and their impact on it. They should be encouraged to discuss their individual assessments as a means of demonstrating the variations available to control risk and the need for practical outcomes. Discussion can also be used to show how norms develop and rules and regulations may follow. In debating their personal attitudes to risk taking, people become better prepared to appraise the risks in life generally and adopt suitable precautions for the benefit of themselves, others and the environment.

To develop pupils' competence in assessing risks and managing them, the teacher can include in schemes of work and lesson plans a reference to any hazardous activity and the precautions that might be applied. In addition to teaching about the practical skills of keeping safe there is a need to know how and where to seek advice about risk and any specific rules or regulations which might apply to both individual and collective responsibility.

An illustration of a layout for a fairly significant risk assessment is shown on page 4.

How risk education could be assessed, measured, accredited.

Two modules of work, which include the elements of risk education outlined in this document, have been validated by the AQA/NEAB Unit Award Scheme. The Assessment of Risk and Uncertainty (Code no.30050), and the Management of Risk and Uncertainty (Code no.30051) carry the support of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and the Association of British Insurers (ABI). These units have been aimed at Keystage 4 pupils but contain the basis of a scheme of work that could be adapted to suit other age groups.

Case Study - what a risk assessment can look like:

Paperwork is a means to an end. The main aim is to develop a discerning attitude of mind. In everyday life young people are hardly likely to get pencil and paper out every time they confront a risk. Success will be achieved when the thought process becomes second nature.

However, it is sensible to jot some ideas down ahead of a challenging or new activity and young people need to know how to go about it. In some cases just annotating schemes of work would be sufficient. In others, a layout like that below might be useful. In the illustration, bold type indicates the general structure that can be applied for any assessment and the ordinary type shows a few examples of entries relevant to a sponsored walk.

Risk assessment for a sponsored walk

Potential hazards	Precautionary control measures	Are controls in place? (Y/N/NA)	Further action? By whom? When?
Environment Weather	Get forecast/clothing appropriate	No	Letter to parents
Equipment/ Substances used Footwear	Boots/stout footwear checked before start	Yes	
What people will be doing Walking Alone	Considered too risky Small groups to be used	Yes	Identify groups Brief parents
Competence and trustworthiness Fitness for the walk	List vetted by PE staff Medical confirmation	Not yet	Concerns raised with parents Consent forms needed
Organisation and control Change from agreed plan People getting lost First aid	Keep within LEA/DfEE guidance Course walked and number of marshals fixed Marshals will be in touch by mobile phone	Yes Yes Yes	Police to be informed of the event First aid box for each staging post

A large print version of this document is also available, upon request.

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