

Tree Climbing Policy

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Approved by: College of Management
Council of Trustees

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Date: November 2017

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September/ October 2017, major review
by Jonathan Hobbs, Mark van Vliet and Marcus Link

Date for next review: September 2019

Policy Statement

The school's policy on tree climbing reflects its pedagogical principles, central to these is the belief that cognitive development cannot be separated from motor development: thinking and moving are inseparable.

Steiner-Waldorf education places an emphasis on experiential learning which includes use of the outdoors wherever possible.

Scope

In contrast to previous versions of this policy, this policy now relates to all pupils at the school and affects all staff. There is separate, specific guidance for specific areas under this policy.

Aims

To fulfil our duty as described above, whilst ensuring that pupils are as safe as possible: protecting them from factors outside their own direct control.

Background

The government's 'Guide to Early Years Foundation Stage' states in clause 1.6: "Educational programmes must involve activities and experiences for children, as follows:

- Physical development involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive; and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement. Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity, and to make healthy choices in relation to food.”

In clause 1.9 it states: “In planning and guiding children’s activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and ‘have a go’;
- active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements; and
- creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.”

A cornerstone of our educational philosophy is that a child learns to think through movement. In tree climbing, the child can find their own limits regarding physical movement, in a safe environment with supportive adults.

The activity lets them develop a healthy relationship with their own bodies and an understanding of their capabilities; developing not only physical skills, but constantly making conscious and unconscious judgements with regard to their own weight, balance, strength and capabilities.

It is vital that the child develops these skills of self-awareness relative to space, movement and consequent risk, as part of their development into responsible adults.

A child that has not had the opportunity to develop these skills, through play generally and climbing in particular, might subsequently be at risk from their inability to assess what they can and cannot do with their bodies. Not least because most pupils have limited access to trees, it is important for the school to offer this developmental activity.

Many organisations have urged schools and councils to reverse the trend towards risk-free playgrounds for these very reasons. For examples, see: ROSPA’s ‘Play Safety’, which states: “We also believe that areas where children play should be as safe as necessary, NOT as safe as possible.” The HSE and the Play Safety Forum issued a joint paper in 2012, “Promoting a balanced approach”.

Professor David Ball from the Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management at Middlesex University is quoted in the National Tree Safety Group’s guidance on trees and public safety “Common Sense Risk Management of Trees” (December 2011): “Safety is but one of the many goals to which we aspire; the mistake that is often made is to focus on safety as if it is the only goal.”

Tree climbing also provides children with an opportunity to genuinely overcome fear – a metaphor for other encounters with fear in later life.

In Steiner-Waldorf education, play is seen as children’s work. It is important for us to provide an environment that facilitates this real play whilst ensuring that it is as safe as necessary.

Hazards

As with any climbing on playground equipment, climbing trees can entail significant risks: pupils may climb to heights from which a fall could lead to serious injury or death.

The school will therefore strike a balance: recognising the significant benefits of tree climbing whilst seeking to reduce or eliminate those risks that lie outside of the direct control of each child.

We recognise that the following factors could increase the risks:

1. Lack of awareness among staff regarding safe play
2. Lack of education for children about safe tree-climbing practices
3. Climbing above hard surfaces or protrusions, such as stone paths or fences
4. Taking ropes or other equipment up a tree
5. Fighting or dangerous play at height
6. Peer pressure to go higher
7. Climbing on weak branches (i.e. thinner than pupil's wrist)
8. Weather conditions
9. Footwear and clothing
10. Climbing in areas out of sight of a supervising adult – when the above risks may not be controlled
11. A pupil's disability
12. Lack of routine inspection and maintenance of safe areas and trees
13. The presence of moveable objects under trees (e.g. logs, wheelbarrows, toys etc.)

Procedure

To mitigate the above risks, the school will:

1. Zone and identify trees suitable for climbing to maximise visibility for break duty staff and eliminate risks of falling onto obstacles.
2. The designated climbing areas are selected to avoid hard ground and/or protrusions.
3. Safe trees will be identified in appropriate risk assessments which will be reviewed from time to time.
4. Mark climbing trees by indicating maximum height to which they may be climbed with paint (ideally white) – where this is practicable.
5. Install woodchips and maintain these on the ground under the climbing areas to ensure that, should a child fall from a tree, the landing will not be on hard ground, thereby, reducing the risk of injury.
6. Ensure supervision levels during break time.
7. Build on the existing best-practice in Early Years and maintain educational sessions on tree-climbing for pupils annually, with the aim of helping children enjoy the activity and becoming good at perceiving and managing risks themselves.
8. Educate break duty staff on rules regarding outdoor play to support them enforcing rules

- based on the hazards identified above.
9. Support supervising adults to exercise their judgement to intervene or ultimately ban children from tree climbing if they deem it appropriate to do so.
 10. Climbing zones and safe trees will be subject to the same routine inspections as play structures.
 11. Ensure that the area underneath the tree is clear of any moveable objects that a child could fall onto.

Further information, advice and guidance

- HSE: CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>
- National Tree Safety Group: Common sense risk management of trees
[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCMS024.pdf/\\$file/FCMS024.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCMS024.pdf/$file/FCMS024.pdf)
- Sir Digby Jones (2007) Cotton Wool Kids. Issues Paper 7. Releasing the potential for children to take risks and innovate:
<http://www.hti.org.uk/pdfs/pu/IssuesPaper7.pdf>
- HTI (2011) Go For It Awards:
<http://www.hti.org.uk/leadership-development/pupil-voice/go4it>
- Wicksteed Playscapes (2008) An essential guide to BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177. Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing.
<http://wicksteed.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/EN1176-and-EN1177.pdf>

Compliance

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/contents>
- Independent school standards, December 2014
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/pdfs/uksi_20143283_en.pdf
- Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage, March 2017
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596629/EYFS_STATUTORY_FRAMEWORK_2017.pdf

References:

- Health & Safety Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy
- Tree climbing education session form (overleaf)
- Tree climbing risk assessment

Tree Climbing Education Session

1. Teachers should use this form to guide sessions with their class.
2. Tree climbing has an important pedagogical role in Waldorf education but it can also cause serious injury and even death.
3. A session must be delivered to each class annually, in October or November. Safe tree-climbing sessions should be held outside.

Topics to be covered (tailor according to age):

1. Respect and care for nature. Looking after trees. (How old is this tree? How should we treat it? Is it ok to whack it with a stick?)
2. Risks. (Climbing can be fun, but if you fall what can happen? Serious injury. That's why these rules are important.)
3. Areas where tree climbing is allowed (Designated areas only. Point them out.)
4. Soft landings (Climbing over stone paths & fences not allowed. Why?)
5. When is it safe to climb? (Is the branch thinner than your thigh? Test branches to see if they'll carry your weight. Slippery/wet/wind/clothing etc.)
6. Ropes and other objects are not allowed up trees. (Why? What can happen with ropes up a tree?)
7. Goading beyond limits. (Is it ok to dare friends to go higher and higher? Why not?)
8. Arguing or fighting whilst up a tree is unsafe. (Why?)
9. If in doubt, stay near the trunk and hug it, call for help!

Please complete and return this to H&S Officer when completed.

Teacher and Class:	Date of Session:
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Pupils Present

1.	14.
2.	15.
3.	16.
4.	17.
5.	18.
6.	19.
7.	20.
8.	21.
9.	22.
10.	23.
11.	24.
12.	25.
13.	26.

Signed:	Date:
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