

ARE WE TOO SAFE?

A few years ago, our 9 year-old boy (now 13) decided to build a tree house in readiness for the water fights that accompanied our summer parties. His plan was to use it as a hide-out and squirt passers by. The job soon became his passion and, after spending most of his holidays for the rest of the year carting planks and thousands of nails, most of which missed their mark, into the tree, it's now a 3 story structure of dizzying height.

Before you wonder why I'm telling you all this, just imagine walking outside to hear your 5-year old calling out to you from the tree in question. He wasn't just in the tree though, he was stood on the roof of the tree house with his older brother. Heart firmly in mouth, I told both to come down and proceeded to limit our youngest to the first level of the tree house, much to his disappointment. In a way I regretted this, but my concern for his safety took over, despite Grandad's best bit of advice – 'just don't look' – which I've heeded often since then.

So – are we becoming too safe? Certainly, schools have a responsibility to safeguard children in their care, but have we gone too far? At the end of this resource are a few wonderful Newsround reports that might help us explore. The first, from the teachers' perspective, shows concern over moves such as five-page reports on the dangers of glue sticks, a ban on sweets due to the risk of choking and running being banned in some playgrounds. The second argues that playgrounds are becoming boring and losing the element of danger that so excites children and the third is yet another list of some things commonly associated with children playing that have been banned in some schools – such as making daisy chains, for fear of catching germs.

Of course, this is an incredibly good topic for children, certainly in all KS2 and probably in infants too, as it's very central to the lives they lead. Here are a few questions you might like

to explore with them:

- Should adults tell children what they can and cannot play?
- Does exciting play always have to have a bit of danger?
- Do rules help us play better or worse?
- Who should set the rules for a playground?
- Is getting hurt ever good for you?
- Are schools now too safe?
- Can you design a playground ride that is exciting but safe?

Schools 'too safe' say teachers:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_8100000/newsid_8108500/8108584.stm

Does safety ruin playground fun?:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_4200000/newsid_4201300/4201390.stm

'Dangerous' daisy chains banned in schools:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/uk/newsid_2158000/2158468.stm

You'll find many other links on these pages to similar news items. The children could maybe collate, scrap book style, a number of them and underline or highlight any pieces of information that helps them in their enquiry. They could do a tour of their own playground, once from the perspective of the children and another as an over-zealous health and safety inspector.

They could make concept maps of key words, such as 'play', 'danger' & 'safety' and look for any connections, and they should certainly be encouraged to raise their own questions in response to the stimuli.

Based on my experience of using this topic with children I'm fairly convinced you'll have a lively enquiry, but be prepared for it to take more than one session. It certainly has the potential to be expanded into lots of other areas of the curriculum too.

Take it easy out there!