

3. Managing risk

The outdoors is often associated with increased health and safety concerns by educators and parents, with natural features seen as intrinsically risky. Concerns about risk can limit opportunities for nature engagement, particularly for the youngest children.

“[Educators] reported that they serve various roles simultaneously including facilitator, safety supervisor, supporter, and observer...many of them pointed out a safety supervisor as their prioritised role.”

(Oh. 2025, p.8)



Look at the photo. Think about what is happening in this interaction and the associated risks and benefits.



Managing risk

What the research tells us

An adult-centric preoccupation with risk often leads educators to adopt a surveillance stance, removing or limiting access to natural elements ^(1,4).

- Professional development about the benefits of nature engagement with opportunities to reflect can help educators rethink their role and start to balance risk and benefit in their practice ^(1,2).

“Adults can play a critical role in limiting the experiences of babies and toddlers outdoors, both directly through their behaviours (removing access) and indirectly (transmitting values and beliefs)”.

(Kemp, Josephidou & Bolshaw, 2025, p.229)

- A small-scale study of English settings highlighted the different perspectives of children (average age of three), their parents and educators, concluding that outdoor spaces may reflect adult needs for safety and supervision rather than what young children want and need ⁽³⁾.
- Leaders and managers can play a critical role in helping to defend and promote nature-engaging pedagogy and practice and managing safety concerns. One manager demonstrated how she had resisted the removal of natural elements from the outdoor space without causing harm to children ⁽²⁾.

Find out more:

1. [Oh \(2025\)](#)
2. [Kemp & Josephidou \(2023b\)](#)
3. [Merrick et al. \(2022\)](#)
4. [Kemp, Josephidou & Bolshaw \(2025\)](#)



A Froebelian approach to nature engagement starts with the child and their intrinsic interests.

