

## Life begins at the Edge of Your Comfort Zone – Let Kids be Kids...

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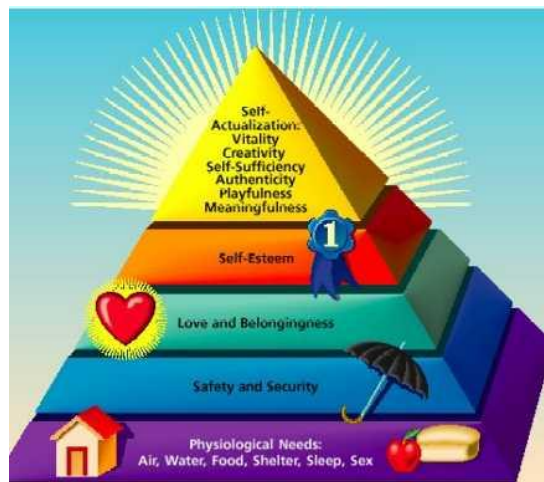
Take a moment to remember your childhood...

What are some of the things you remember the most?

I remember climbing trees, walking along fences, the higher the better and more than anything being encouraged to try anything and everything. If at first I didn't achieve, then I was encouraged to keep trying, persisting until I achieved success. Taking risks was the way I learned and it has definitely supported me through life's challenges. It has given me the ability to look at a challenge, and move through it learning along the way. It has helped me to believe in my capabilities, build my self-esteem and confidence which has got me to where I am today, and I'm sure will take me to where I am supposed to be.

The world we live in is full of challenges; we face them every day. They don't come wrapped in cotton wool or bubble wrap; they often hit us like a train; and it takes great effort to get up and face them. The feeling ignited within us when we have not only faced the challenge but overcome it, is amazing.

Maslow called it 'self-actualisation' in his Hierarchy of Needs theory. Self-Actualisation is at the top of his theoretical hierarchy; he acknowledges that this is not somewhere you stay for long, and in order to move up the scale you have to have the needs met at each level. Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled, a person seeks to fulfil the next one, and so on.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A parent's wish is for their children to have great self-esteem, vitality, creativity, be self-sufficient, authentic, and playful, and to feel that life is meaningful by the time they are 21. This starts in the womb and is supported by the environment in which we live and the way we choose to live our lives; nature and nurture. Nature is that which is inherited / genetic. Nurture refers to all environmental influences, i.e. experience.

If you compared your childhood to that of your children today, think about what is different and why things have changed. Some would say society has changed. Yes, it has; however does that mean that the way we raise our children needs to change? I agree we need to be aware of stranger danger, technology and equipment, however does it really mean we need to change the experiences of childhood so drastically

that we could be doing our children the disservice of trying to dismiss risk as they grow up? Wrapping them in bubble wrap or cotton wool can disempower them so that they never learn to take a risk or learn to function without the bubble wrap and cotton wool.

Celia Lashlie said on the TV NZ Sunday program, “What happens if our children don’t get the chance to take risks? We have higher statistics for prisons inmates, higher youth suicide, more lost boys, more heart ache for us all. The pendulum has swung too far and bubble wrap is smothering young children. Let children give their risk muscle a work out, they need to learn to exercise it so that first time the child makes the decision, if he hasn’t used his risk muscle, the decision could be fatal”.

Lady Allen of Hurtwood stated “Better a broken arm than a broken spirit”.

This is the philosophy home based childcare provider “@ a home” believes in. A broken arm can be fixed in four to six weeks, however the spirit can take years to fix and only with a lot of hard work and support. It is with this in mind “@ a home” chooses to manage safety rather than eliminate it. Even when safety is managed injuries can still happen, however they are few and far between and commonly minor. Accidents can happen at any time no matter how hard we try to control the risk.

We provide for children under 6, and in particular children under 3, opportunities to exercise their risk muscle. We believe it is a vital part of a child’s life that has been disrupted by today’s society. We agree with Celia Lashie that the pendulum has swung too far. Unfortunately many parents are wrapping their children in cotton wool or bubble wrap. As parents, if we try too hard to keep our children safe, we deprive them of the opportunities of learning risk management and experiencing reward. Some of the most important things we learn in life are from making ‘miss - takes’ and experiencing failures. Making miss – takes and experiencing failure is how our children learn about resilience. It’s about giving things a go... having fun...finding out about yourself, and what you are capable of...

Every Friday morning, rain or shine, we go to Nature Play, located in Watchman Road by the Napier Airport. The environment is full of beautiful oak trees, green grass and a stretch of water with ducks and swans. You can hear the children’s excitement as they are getting out of the car already talking about what they might find or do this morning. The only items that are taken are the children’s morning teas and blankets to sit on. We believe that nature provides a mountain of resources; we just need to learn how to use them.

Recently we all observed the children, without adult interference, finding their own sticks and digging for worms – this was not how they started. They asked if we could bring a spade to dig and a bucket for the worms. Our responses were consistently redirecting the children to look for resources that could be used as a substitute such as “you could try a stick” and hand them one. Now they have become self-sufficient in this area and scan the environment for tools to make their work (play) easier. In doing this we have

provided the children with valuable learnings about their environment. You don't always need a bucket and spade and in fact having these items can actually hinder their imagination.



This type of risk is emotional: finding a bug... the exhilaration of actually finding a bug and then the risk that I might not actually want to be near the bug. The children now explore with confidence, supporting each other when they find something, and showing the adults with pride in their eyes.

Another **emotional risk** they experience is 'being part of a group' and 'joining a group'. This is based around the importance of relationships and is vital for children's self-development, as relationships are very much a part of a whole life. Each time a child steps out to build a relationship they are taking a risk and the learning gained, managing the risk, is setting them up for life.

Then the **physical risks**, which as a society we seem to deem as the worst ones in early childhood, are also critical. With physical risks, we try to wrap the children up and decide for them. In doing so, we unintentionally limit our children's physical confidence and create a childhood different to our own because we want to avoid our children being physically hurt. In fact, if we think about it, we learned through our own physical experience, and that's how our children will learn.

Learning to climb trees and farm fences in a safe, controlled, manner is a challenge our children have embraced and persevered with. It's been a journey full of frustration, support, practice and overall success. Each child is at a different place in their journey, however watching those that have achieved success has really spurred the learning on for those who are still in progress. Peer support has become a huge part of the journey which has been fantastic to observe.



This is where it all started, on the fence at the farm after feeding the baby lambs. It then moved to a location on the farm that we have our Nature Play. Here it was practiced on the farm fence and the trees. The children have learned so much about themselves and take pride in their success.

Lukas' first challenge was exercising his physical rick muscle was to climb onto the tree stump with adult support. Lukas can now climb up by himself, as you can see in the photographs. His second challenge was

to jump off, firstly with adult support, now he does it independently. Look at the pride on his face in the fourth photograph. He is building good self-esteem and belief in his own abilities. YES he is taking a risk... how this risk has been managed, in a positive manner, empowers the use of his risk muscle.



Rylan was under two when he first started to climb the farm fence. He would sit back and observe 3 year old Annabella to begin with, and then one day he tried for himself. He could get to the top, however he needed the support of the two adults to get over the fence. For many Fridays, he practiced climbing to the top of the fence until he achieved success. Then it was time to practice getting down the other side. It would be fair to say he nailed that very quickly. Rylan now climbs the farm fence confidently and independently, all by the age of two. Rylan has mastered success and he knows it.



Rylan practising climbing the fence – you can see his confidence in his movements.



Annabella practising her climbing – you can see her confidence in the way she holds herself.

Exercising and practising using his risk muscle has paid off for Rylan. This week after continued observations of other children achieving success, Rylan set the 'climbing wall' as his next challenge. He began on his own (with some positive support from an adult who was just metres away), got half way, stopped, and looked for her. His support person moved to his side and showed him where to put his hand next. From this point Rylan was away again and managed to get to the top.

Yet another risk well managed and mastered.



My question to you..... Is it *our* perception of risk as an adult that makes us hold our children back?

Maybe what we need to do is walk a mile in our children's shoes again by re looking at our own childhood and the learnings we accomplished, and how we accomplished them. This just might support the children of today to recapture the type of childhood we all had and give them the positive opportunity to exercise their risk muscles in a safe manner with our support.

After all.... life starts at the edge of your comfort zone, let kids be kids again...

References:

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