Supporting Play:  
How to supervise challenging play in the school yard

We encourage play supervisors to follow these helpful steps before intervening in play they feel is challenging or risky. This approach allows for the adult to fully comprehend the situation so their intervention can be more informed and effective. It also provides some time for students to practice independent risk assessment and conflict management.

1. **WATCH:** Get a good understanding of what is going on, and determine if students are managing risk independently.

2. **WAIT:** Check-in with yourself, and weigh your fear against actual risk.

3. **MOVE CLOSER:** Get another perspective. Does your presence cue the children to manage the situation differently?

4. **INTERVENE without SHUTTING DOWN THE PLAY:** Inform students about the risks and provide guidelines for them to manage those risks. Negotiate some modifications with the students to manage the risks differently (e.g. moving activity from asphalt to grass).

Play Prompts:  
Language to support play

*These prompts were developed by Platinum OPAL School, Chester Elementary (TDSB), to support students taking responsibility for their play. Staff supervising play would use this language when intervening in challenging or risky outdoor play. This same language is used to guide discussions about play inside the school; in the classroom, at assemblies and on school display boards.*

- Are you having fun?
- Is it safe enough for you?
- Are you including others?
Language to Support Play:  
Instead of saying NO – try these!

Many social conflicts and behavioral issues during play time are motivated by feelings of frustration or anger towards the many restrictions in the school yard. Instead of saying NO, try to support the student’s play and help them to work through solutions to continue safely and make better decisions in the future.

When students are play fighting with loose parts:

“Are you still having fun? If not, maybe you should play with something/someone else.”

“Have you checked in with your partner? Is she/he still having fun?”

“What would happen if you hit each other’s face/head/eyes?”

“Are you aiming below the shoulders?”

When students are climbing/managing heights:

“Do you feel safe?”, “What would happen if…?”, “What’s your next step?”

“Do you think that’s stable? How can we make that work?”

“Look around. Have you checked to see if anyone near you could get hurt?”

When students are in an area that is challenging to supervise or off limits:

“Why have you chosen this spot to play? Is there any spot in the yard that has the same features (e.g. shade, privacy, slopes, mud etc.)?”

“Do you know why this area is off limits?”

“Is there anywhere else you could play?”