

How To Keep Your Child Safe On A Playground

Urging kids to "Run along and play" should not amount to sending them off to harm themselves. Sadly, that's too often the result. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), more than 200,000 children are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year as a result of injuries related to playground equipment, and about 15 children die. Here are some suggestions to help your kids "Run along and play safely."

Safety At Home

- * Buy well-made equipment and assemble it correctly. Place it on a level surface and anchor it firmly.
- * About 70 percent of all playground injuries are caused by falls. The surface under any playground should be made of wood chips, shredded wood mulch or rubber, sand, or pea gravel, and should be at least 12 inches deep. This use-zone surface should extend six feet from the play area's perimeter.
- * Swing seats should be made of soft materials, like lightweight canvas, soft rubber, or plastic.
- * Do not use swings in the shape of animals. They have been associated with several deaths a year. Also, the CPSC recommends full-bucket seats for younger children.
- * Do not buy equipment with open "S" hooks, sharp edges, or openings between 3.5 and 9 inches. A child's head may get caught in openings that size, and he might strangle. This hazard has been especially common on rings and guardrails.
- * Install playground equipment at least six feet from fences or walls, and in shady areas or facing north.
- * Place protective caps on all exposed screws or bolts. Check for loose nuts and bolts monthly.

Do An Inspection In The Park

- * Check out your public playground carefully before using it.
- * Be sure there are open spaces, fences, or hedges to prevent kids from running into areas with cars.
- * Make sure the use zones have the recommended surfaces. The use zone in front and back of a swing should extend out at least twice the height of the swing, as measured from the ground to the crossbar.
- * Surfaces 30 inches or more above the ground need guardrails.
- * The highest climbing platform for preschool children should not exceed six feet. For school-age children, eight feet is the limit.
- * Swings should be spaced at least 24 inches apart, and at least 30 inches from the supportive structure.
- * Moving equipment should be separated from other equipment by 12 feet, with no accessible parts that can crush or pinch fingers.
- * Ideally, preschoolers should have separate areas.
- * There should be no sharp points or edges that can cause cuts.
- * All "S" hooks should be closed.
- * Be sure sliding equipment has a platform, so kids can climb down if they want. There should be a bar across the top to force kids to sit down before sliding. Also, there should be no V-shaped openings, or open areas close to the tops of slides, where clothing could get caught.
- * Avoid areas with exposed concrete footings, tree roots, or rocks.

Play An Active Role

- * Approximately 40 percent of playground injuries are due to inadequate supervision. Be sure an adult actively supervises your child.
- * Do not allow horseplay.
- * Make sure your child plays on age-appropriate equipment. Equipment is specifically designed for ages two through five, and five through twelve.
- * Children from two through five should not play on the following equipment: chain or cable walks, free-standing arch climbers or climbing equipment with flexible components, fulcrum seesaws, log rolls, long spiral slides (more than one turn), overhead rings, parallel bars, swinging gates, track rides, and vertical sliding poles.
- * Do not allow children to twist the swings, swing empty seats, or walk in the path of moving swings.
- * Do not allow your child to play on hot metal surfaces, or equipment with rust, chipping, splinters, cracks, or other signs of decay.
- * Never dress kids in scarves, or loose or stringed clothing, when they are going to be on playground equipment. The loose items can get caught and strangle a child.
- * For more information, contact the National Program for Playground Safety at their website.

About the Author

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