Playground Safety

A playground offers a place of fun and recreation for the children of your organization. However, improperly installed or maintained playground equipment can cause serious falls and injuries to children. While not all accidents can be avoided, the following tips will help make the playground a safer place.

Site Selection and Layout

When choosing a location to build a playground, consider the following items:

- Build the playground in a location that will eliminate any obstacles or hazards children could encounter when traveling to and from the playground site. For example, children should not have to cross a street or travel through a parking lot to get to the playground.
- Provide appropriate boundaries around the playground, such as fences or landscape hedges, so that children cannot leave and others cannot enter the playground area unnoticed.
- Separate areas for physical activities, such as play equipment or open fields, from areas for more passive or quiet activities, such as sandbox play.
- Make sure that playground equipment is designed for different developmental age groups. For example, equipment designed for ages two to five should be kept separate from that designed for ages five to twelve.
- Spread around heavily used pieces of equipment to avoid crowding in any one area.
- Make sure there are no visual barriers between equipment and activity areas so that those supervising children can keep a clear line of sight.

Equipment Selection

- Use only commercial grade playground equipment and have it installed according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Residential grade playground equipment will not withstand continual use and will increase the likelihood of exposure to injury.
- Consider which age groups will be using the equipment and purchase it accordingly.
- Request detailed product information from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207.
- **Avoid** installing any hazardous types of equipment, including the following:
    - Animal figure swings and/or spring-loaded equipment.
    - Exercise rings (as used in gymnastics) and trapeze bars.

- Glider swings that hold more than one child at a time.
- Merry-go-rounds.
- Metal slides.
- Monkey bars.
- People use the terms monkey bars, jungle gyms, and climbing equipment interchangeably, but actual monkey bars are a specific type of climbing equipment with interior bars from which a child may fall from a height greater than 18 inches. In the early 1980s, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that monkey bars were unsuitable for safe playgrounds.
- Seesaws and old-style teeter-totters.
- Swings with seats that are made of wood, metal. or hard plastic. Seats should be made of rubber or canvas.
- Swinging ropes that can fray, unravel, or form a noose. Any kind of rope attached to play equipment poses a strangulation hazard, so never let children tie jump ropes or pet leashes onto the equipment.
- Trampolines. These are never appropriate for safe playgrounds.



Good Playground Equipment Example

This photo shows an excellent example of commercial grade playground equipment that is being well maintained.

Note that the equipment has been provided with 1) an adequate amount of shock absorbing material in and around the playground equipment; and 2) is located an adequate distance away from any other pieces of equipment to prevent overcrowding.

Playground Surfaces

The surface in and around playground equipment can be a major factor in determining the injury causing potential of a fall. A fall onto a shock absorbing surface is less likely to cause an injury than a fall onto a hard surface. Because head injuries from a fall can be life threatening, the more shock absorbing a surface can be made, the greater the likelihood of reducing severe injuries.

- **Avoid the following:**
  - Asphalt or concrete are unsuitable for use under and around playground equipment.
  - Earth surfaces, such as soil and hard packed dirt also are not recommended because they have poor shock absorbing properties.
  - Grass and turf are not recommended because wear and environmental

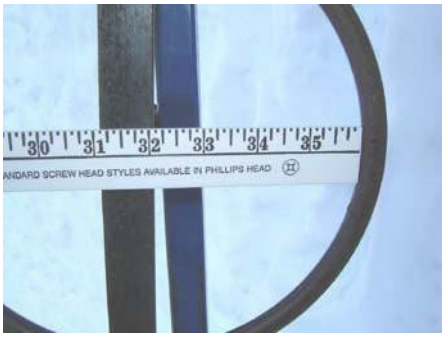
conditions can reduce their effectiveness in absorbing shock during a fall.

- **Use the following:**
    - Make sure surfaces around playground equipment have at least 9 to 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, sand, or pea gravel.
    - An alternative is mats or synthetic surfacing made of safety-tested rubber or rubber-like materials.
    - Check that protective surfacing extends at least six (6) feet in all directions from the play equipment.
    - For swings, be sure surfacing extends in back and front twice the height of the suspending bar.

Inspection and Maintenance

To help provide and maintain a safe playground, review the following checklist:

- Install and maintain all playground equipment according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Create a maintenance schedule for the entire playground, taking into consideration the type of equipment, frequency of use, and local climate.
- Inspect all equipment for the following items on a regular basis:
    - Check that there are no sharp points, corners, and edges on any of the equipment's parts.
        - All metal or wood corners should be rounded.
        - Wood parts should be smooth and free of splinters.
    - Protective caps should not be able to be loosened or removed without the use of a tool.
        - Replace any missing or damaged protective caps.
    - Fasteners and connectors should not be able to be loosened or removed without the use of a tool.
        - All nuts and bolts should have lock washers, self-locking nuts, or other locking means to prevent them from easily becoming loosened.
        - All hardware should be made of corrosion-resistant material.
    - To reduce the risk of entrapment, there should be no openings on playground equipment that measure between 3.5 and 9 inches.
        - The only exception would be where the playground equipment meets the ground.
        - Pay special attention to openings at the top of a slide, between platforms, and on limbers where the distance between rungs might be less than nine (9) inches.



Entrapment Hazard Example

This photo is an example of a piece of playground equipment that has an opening larger than 3.5 inches and would pose an entrapment hazard.

- Anchor equipment securely to the ground.
    - Make sure that all anchoring devices are below ground to eliminate the potential for tripping hazards.
- Protrusions or projections should not be capable of entangling children's clothing.
- There should be no broken or missing components in the following:
    - Handrails
    - Guardrails
    - Protective barriers
    - Steps or rungs on ladders
- Paint, galvanize, or otherwise treat any metal playground equipment to prevent rust.
    - Ensure that the paint or similar finish does not contain a harmful amount of lead.
    - If older playground equipment is being used, test the finish to determine the amount of lead, especially if the finish is beginning to flake or peel.
- Make sure all S hooks are squeezed closed and in good condition, with no visible signs of corrosion or deterioration.



Example Hazardous S Hook

This photo is an example of an S hook that has *not* been completely squeezed closed.

The chain used in this illustration could easily slip out of the S hook, allowing the swing and child to fall to the ground.

- Inspect the playground for broken glass or other dangerous debris.
- Conveniently locate and maintain appropriate trash receptacles on the playground.
- Inspect the shock absorbing surface in and around the playground equipment to determine that it has not been displaced or compacted in high traffic areas.
- Correct or remove any tripping hazards, such as exposed concrete footings, tree stumps, and rocks.
- Repair any areas that have inadequate drainage or low spots that would allow standing water.

Supervision

Without adequate supervision, even playgrounds that are designed, installed, and maintained in accordance with safety guidelines and standards can still impose hazards to children.

Supervisors can be paid employees, volunteers, or even parents. However, they should all have one thing in common: an understanding of the basics of playground safety. A trained playground supervisor can help reduce the number and severity of playground injuries.

To adequately supervise a playground, all supervisors should be trained on the following:

- The types of playground equipment provided.

- The hazards associated with the different types of playground equipment provided.
- Age-appropriateness of playground equipment.
- First Aid.
- Strangulation or entrapment hazards for children on the playground, including scarves, jackets, or sweatshirts with hoods or drawstrings, connected mittens or gloves, jewelry, and bicycle helmets.
- The organization's procedures regarding how to handle emergencies, such as how to appropriately handle a playground injury that would require medical attention.

It is important to do whatever we can to keep our children safe. By following these tips and recommendations for playground safety, your organization will be better prepared to prevent unsafe situations or injuries that could harm the youth of your congregation.

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