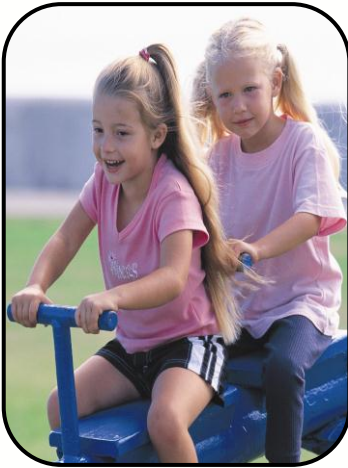




Playground Safety

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates more than 200,000 children annually visit hospital emergency rooms because of playground injuries. Many playground injuries can be prevented. Use this guide to ensure your children can safely run, jump, swing and slide to their heart's content.



Soft surface

Because nearly 80 percent of playground injuries are caused by falls to the ground, improper surfacing is the first thing parents should watch for when inspecting a playground. Wood chips, mulch, wood fibers, sand, pea gravel, shredded tires and rubber mats cushion falls well. Avoid playgrounds with concrete, grass and dirt surfaces, as they are too hard. The surface material should be at least 12 inches in depth and 6 feet around each piece of playground equipment.

Swings

Swings are the pieces of moving equipment that are most likely to cause injuries to children. Animal swings have caused several deaths and should not be used. Metal or wooden seats should be replaced with soft seats. Swings should be set far enough away from other equipment so that children won't be hit by a moving swing. Only two swings should be in each supporting framework, and they should be at least 24 inches apart. Full-bucket seats are recommended for younger children. Half-bucket seats are dangerous because babies and toddlers can slide out of them.

Smooth sliding

Slides should be well-anchored, have firm handrails and good traction on the steps. There should be no gaps between the slide and the platform, and there should be a bar at the top of the slide so that children have to sit before going down. A great danger with slides occurs when drawstrings on children's clothes get caught at the top of the slide. Although most children's clothing manufacturers have quit making drawstrings, many children have older clothes.

Safe seesaws and merry-go-rounds

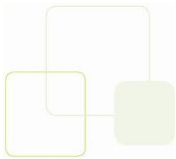
Spring-loaded seesaws are best for young children. Avoid adjustable seesaws with chains because children can crush their hands under the chains. A traditional seesaw should have a tire or some other object under the seat to keep it from hitting the ground. Merry-go-rounds, or "whirls" or "roundabouts," are best for school-age children. They should have hand grips, and the rotating platform should be level, free of sharp edges and have adequate clearance to prevent crushing or severing limbs.

Climb carefully

More children are injured falling off climbing equipment or horizontal ladders than anything else on the playground. Children under 4 shouldn't play on this equipment. Watch older children when they're climbing, check that steps and handrails are in good condition and make sure a guardrail or barrier surrounds raised platforms. Any climbing ropes should be secured at the top and bottom. The number of injuries caused by monkey bars is so significant that many experts recommend that they be removed from all playgrounds.

Improve your playground

If your child's playground is unsafe, report problems to the owner or operator. There are no national mandatory standards for playground equipment, but Texas, California, New Jersey, Michigan and North Carolina have laws that require playgrounds to follow standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials. Some states require playgrounds to follow standards set in the Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*.



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