

Early Childhood Safety Checklist — #5

Playgrounds

by Susan S. Aronson, MD

Use this checklist to find hazards. Whenever a hazard is found, fix it if you can. If you cannot fix it, make a note of it and plan to get it fixed. Safety checks should be done at least once a month. Having different people do the safety checks helps find more hazards. The more people who are involved in watching for hazards, the more they will help fix hazards whenever they see them. Safety is everyone's business!

Yes No

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The playground offers a wide range of parallel and interactive activities. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All surfaces underneath play equipment are covered with 10 to 12 inches of impact-absorbing material such as sand, wood chips, or pea gravel, or with a manufactured energy-absorptive surface which is under and extends at least 6 feet on all sides of the equipment. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Surfaces are raked weekly to remove litter, sharp objects, and animal feces. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Stagnant pools of water are not present. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | All pieces of play equipment are at least 8 feet apart. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Boundaries such as railroad ties, low bushes, benches, or painted lines separate play equipment from walking areas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bike or trike riding areas are separate from other equipment. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Playgrounds are fenced in. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Exposed concrete or hard anchoring material is covered. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There are no sharp edges, loose connections, exposed nails, or bolt ends. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Equipment is appropriate to the size and development of the children. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The playground is designed for safety. Caregivers remind children regularly of playground safety rules. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Swing sets are placed 9 or more feet from other equipment and at least 8 feet from walls, fences, walkways, and other play areas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Swings are hung at least 1-1/2 feet apart from each other. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slides have an 8 to 9 foot run-off space. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slides are no taller than 6 feet and have side rims at least 2-1/2 inches high. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slides have an enclosed platform at the top for children to rest on and get into position. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Slide ladders have flat steps and a handrail on each side. |

- Slides have a flat surface at the bottom to slow children down.
- Metal slides are shaded to prevent overheating.
- Wood slides are waxed or oiled to prevent rough surfaces.
- The slide incline is equal to or less than a 30-degree angle.
- Steps and rungs are 7 to 11 inches apart and are evenly spaced for easy climbing.
- Climbing or swinging bars stay in place when grasped.
- The maximum height of play equipment is 6 feet.
- Climbers have regularly spaced footholds from top to bottom.
- The tops of climbers have a "safe way out" for children.
- Playground equipment has no openings 4-3/8 to 9-1/2 inches to entrap a child's head.
- Rungs on climbers are painted in bright or contrasting colors for easy visibility.
- Swings with chair seats are available for children under age 5.
- Swings with canvas sling seats are available for children over 5.
- Swings have no "S" or open-ended hooks.
- The points at which swing seats and chains meet are enclosed in plastic tubing.
- Hanging rings are less than 5 inches or more than 10 inches in diameter (smaller or larger than a child's head).
- Seesaw equipment is designed to prevent pinching.
- Wooden blocks or parts of a rubber tire are placed beneath the ends of seesaws to prevent feet from getting caught.
- Merry-go-rounds are installed so that a child cannot fit head or body beneath the turning platform.
- Sandboxes are located in the shade, have smooth frames, and are covered when not in use.
- Sandbox sand is raked at least every 2 weeks to remove debris.
- Pools are fenced in and closed to trespassers. They have been inspected and their safety equipment, sanitation, procedures, and supervision have been approved.
- Play areas are free of trash cans and poisonous plants and berries.
- Play areas have clean drinking water and lots of shade.
- Caregivers can easily view the entire play area.

- Caregivers closely supervise high risk areas such as climbing equipment.
- Adult seating near the high risk areas is provided to encourage adult observation.
- Children learn how to use sports equipment and how to use the proper safety equipment for each sport.
- Children learn water safety and they are always watched by adults when they are in or near water.
- Children over 3 years of age should know how to swim.
- The caregiver gives specific safety instructions such as "Don't climb the tree" or "Stay inside the fence."
- The caregiver looks around the playground for broken glass and other dangerous debris before permitting children to play.
- A well-stocked first aid kit is accessible to all caregivers during outdoor play.

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