

Home Outdoor Play Safety Guidelines

Every year more than 200,000 children end up in emergency rooms with injuries associated with outdoor play equipment. Of that 200,000, 80% are due to children falling from play equipment. The following guidelines can be used to help you make sure that your outdoor play area is a safe place for children.

- 1. Supervision:** Make sure adults provide active supervision when children are playing outside. Children should be easily seen – check that there are no blind spots where children can play out of sight. Never attach or allow children to attach ropes or clotheslines to play equipment as children can strangle themselves on these.
- 2. Protective Surfacing:** The Office of Child Care’s *Rules for Registered Family Child Care Homes* does not require playground equipment surfacing; however, concrete, dirt, and grass are *not* adequate fall protection. All surfaces around playground equipment that is from 30 inches to 4 feet in height should have at least 6 inches of shock-absorbing material such as wood chips, shredded rubber, or pea gravel. Play equipment that is *more* than 4 feet in height should have a *minimum* of 9 inches of loose-fill material; or use **safety-tested** rubber surfacing mats. The protective surfacing should extend at least six feet from all sides of the play equipment.
- 3. Guardrails:** Elevated platforms and ramps that are more than 30 inches high should have guardrails or barriers to prevent falls.
- 4. Spacing:** Openings in play equipment, guardrails, or ladder rungs should measure *less than* 3.5 inches or *more than* 9 inches. This can help prevent a child’s head or neck from being trapped, or a child completely slipping through an opening.
- 5. Equipment:** Check that there are no sharp points or edges, holes, cracks, or splinters in or on play equipment, and that hardware is in good condition – no open “S” hooks, protruding bolts, or broken parts.
- 6. Tripping Hazards:** There should be no exposed concrete footings, tree roots, or rocks that could trip children.
- 7. Maintenance:** Regularly perform maintenance checks on play equipment and surfacing to make sure they are in good condition. Loose-fill surfacing materials such as pea gravel and wood chips should be raked on a regular basis.

It is important for children of all abilities, and especially for children with special needs, to have daily access to a diversity of outdoor play experiences in a safe and age-appropriate environment. Outdoor play provides children with opportunities for discovery and learning, assists in the development of social and emotional skills, enhances large motor skills, and can provide children with a sense of mastery and confidence. Research has shown that the physical activity that comes with outdoor play can improve children’s attentiveness, decreases restless, and helps to reduce children’s tension and stress.