



Playgrounds

Playgrounds are a great opportunity to get children outside. They provide exercise, socialization and encourages taking on new physical challenges in a fun setting. However not all playgrounds offer the same level of safety, potentially turning an afternoon at camp or fun trip to the park to an emergency room visit and call to a parent.

Recreational activities are pillars of summer/winter camp, summer school, and recreational center experiences. They provide an opportunity for socialization and learning in a fun setting. These activities also provide an increased liability and potential for staff and/or participant injury. The safety of participants and staff should be standard operating procedure. It should be completed to the highest professional standards and in line with federal, state, local, and accrediting agency guidelines. The following checklist template provides a high level oversight to assist with your activity structure. Your organization is responsible for the development of your own written program guidelines and policies for the oversight of your activities. Through consistent management and preventative programs, exposures can be reduced to help ensure a safe recreational experience.

Pre-Activity - Get Ready to Play

- Playground Maintenance - Whether the equipment is owned, at a school site or at a public park, well maintained equipment is key to safe play.
- Take time to look the equipment over before letting the children play. Are there signs of vandalism, look for sharp edges, objects in the play surface, adequate depth play surface, protruding nails, splinters, guardrails on elevated surfaces, tree roots or holes where children will be prone to trips/falls.
- Playgrounds are an excellent activity for a variety of age groups. However, not every playground is suited for all ages.
- Look for posted signs or labels on equipment designating the age equipment was designed for; Toddlers - up to 24 months, Pre-schoolers - two to five years old and School age - 5-12 years old. Pre-School and School age are the most common found at public parks and schools.
- Is there adequate spacing between the swings and play structures and between a Pre-School play structure and School Age structure to reduce the chance of a children getting hit by a swing or colliding with a younger child?
- Is equipment set away from parking lots, roads, or within a fenced area allowing children to run freely. When they are engaged in play and running around, the thought of cars is not on their minds.
- Metal and plastic equipment can become very hot during the summer months. Check surface temperatures prior to play.
- Emergency preparedness - Have a first-aid kit available and emergency contact information if offsite.
- STOP** - Can activity continue safely?

Time to Play

- Communicate expectations of play to participants.
- Time to Play is not rest time for Counselors - Supervision, Supervision, Supervision.

Recreational/Camp Activities: Specialty Care Services

- Public parks offer great play structures, but supervision in these situations are harder. Great opportunity for children to wear camp shirts making it easier to distinguish campers from other children.
- Walk the playground regularly to ensure positive play activities are taking place in tunnels, playhouses and other concealed areas of the structure.
- Conduct a head count check. If planning to be playing for an extended period, it is good to do a head count check every 15 minutes especially at public playgrounds where children may be distracted from other park activities. Know your potential wanderers ahead of time.
- Water Breaks - Have water / fluids available.
- Help make the environment fun, encourage and assist the younger or less physical children navigate a challenging section of the structure.

Post-Play Time:

- Conduct a final head count before loading a van or returning inside.
- Check for personal belongings left behind.
- If visiting a new offsite playground, take time to evaluate the activity and environment. Was it suited for the children in your program? Was it age appropriate? Did the environment allow for adequate supervision? Was the equipment well maintained?
- Recapping the activity will help ensure it was a fun and safe environment for future activities.
- If applicable, communicate concerns or safety issues with Program Director.

Additional Resources:

[Consumer Product Safety Commission](#)

[National Program for Playground Safety](#)

[National Recreation and Park Association](#)

[Loss Control Services Technical Bulletin: Playground Safety](#)

Providing solutions
to help our members
manage risk.®

For your risk management
and safety needs, contact
Nationwide Loss Control
Services: 1-866-808-2101
or LCS@nationwide.com.