

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Summer Playground Safety

Swings, slides, seesaws, monkey bars - a playground for active children. Outdoor playground equipment is used not only in public areas such as school yards and parks, but also in yards of private homes. Playgrounds provide a place for children to learn, have fun, and exercise. Adults need to be aware that playground equipment can result in serious injuries to children. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated more than 100,000 playground equipment related injuries happen each year on or around public and private playground equipment and require hospital emergency room treatment. But there are things you can do to help children play happily and safely.

Select Equipment Wisely

Most playground equipment is bought unassembled. Be sure it comes with complete instructions for installation and assembly. Follow instructions carefully.

Look for the following points if you are purchasing new playground equipment or if you are checking an older set for safety:

- ▶ Exposed screws and bolts. They should have protective caps. If caps are lost, replace them or wrap the screws and bolts with a heavy, waterproof tape.
- ▶ Lightweight, flexible seats.
- ▶ Slides with horizontal steps and good tread. There should be at least a one-inch rim on the sides of the slide so children can't fall off.
- ▶ Stability of equipment is very important. Either use anchoring devices or cement to hold equipment firmly in the ground. Make certain anchoring devices are placed below ground level so children don't trip over them or fall on them.

- ▶ Use of equipment with sharp edges or rough surfaces should be avoided. Cover sharp edges with heavy, waterproof tape.
- ▶ Open-ended hooks, particularly S-hooks on swings, are dangerous. If your set has S-hooks, pinch the ends of the hooks in tightly with a pair of pliers to prevent parts of the body or clothing from catching.
- ▶ Don't buy swing sets with rings or closed loops that measure more than five inches but less than ten inches on the inside diameter, since a child can entangle his head, and perhaps strangle, in rings of this size. If your set is equipped with rings between five and ten inches in diameter, remove them.
- ▶ Don't put up equipment which has pinch or crush points on moving parts, such as glider hinges.
- ▶ When installing playground equipment in the backyard, remember to place sets at least six feet from obstructions such as fences or walls.
- ▶ During play season, check twice a month to be certain that all nuts, bolts, and clamps are tight.
- ▶ Replace rusted nuts, bolts, swing chains and seats.
- ▶ Sand and repaint all rusted areas on metal tubing.
- ▶ Install equipment on a soft surface, such as dirt or cover the areas with saw dust, shredded wood or sand. Avoid installing equipment over rough, rocky ground. Never pave the area under playground equipment with cement, brick, or asphalt.

Teach Safe Play

Teach children safe play habits and supervise their use of play equipment. Children should be taught:

Swings

- ▶ To sit in the center of a swing, not off to one side, and not to stand or kneel on a swing.

- ▶ Not to twist swing chains, which can reduce the strength.
- ▶ Not to walk in front of moving swings or swing empty seats.

Slides

- ▶ Use the steps to the slide; never climb up the sliding surface.
- ▶ Slide down one at a time feet first, always sitting up.

Seesaws

- ▶ Sit forward on seesaws, partners facing one another.
- ▶ Hold on with both hands.
- ▶ Be sure each partner has both feet on the ground before getting off.

Climbing Equipment

- ▶ Climb only on equipment made for climbing.
- ▶ Hold on tightly when climbing, using a firm "lock grip."
- ▶ Avoid bumping or stepping on others.
- ▶ Not to push, shove or fight while using play equipment.

Small Swimming Pools

Many families have small swimming pools. It is absolutely necessary that adults supervise children who are using any size swimming pool. Even small swimming pools are extremely dangerous.

- ▶ A wading pool with only a little water in it is potentially dangerous.
- ▶ Small pools should always be emptied when not in use.
- ▶ Larger pools should be fenced in and the gate kept locked when pool is not in use.
- ▶ Any type of diving into a small pool should be prohibited.
- ▶ Toddlers and preschoolers can have much enjoyment playing in a small pool, but safety should be stressed and enforced.

Summertime can be a fun time for young children if parents and adults take necessary precautions to ensure safe play. Children, especially young children, can't anticipate danger. They are learners, beginners, and need adult supervision. The time it takes to buy play equipment wisely or to recondition old equipment is time well spent. If a small swimming pool is part of the family's summertime activity, then parents and adults must be willing to spend the time that is necessary to properly supervise the children's play in it.

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Be Particularly Aware of These 9 Playground Equipment Dangers

Pinch-Crush Parts - Moving parts particularly on gliders and seesaws can pinch or crush fingers.

Rings - Swinging exercise rings with a diameter between five and ten inches can entrap a child's head. Remove such rings and discard them where children will not find and play with them.

"S" Hooks - Open-ended hooks, especially "S" hooks on swings which can catch skin or clothing, should be avoided. If a set has such hooks, pinch the ends in tightly with a pair of pliers.

Hard, Heavy Swing Seats - Hard, heavy swing seats can strike a dangerous blow. Choose a set with lightweight seats or purchase such seats separately and replace the hard seats. Metal seats should have smooth, rolled edges.

Inadequate Spacing - Install the set a minimum of six feet away from fences, building walls, walkways and other play areas such as sandboxes.

Exposed Screws and Bolts - Most sets include protective caps to cover screws and bolts. When protective caps are not included, tape over all exposed screws and bolts, even those which appear to be out of the child's reach.

Hard Surfaces - Do not install the set over hard surfaces such as concrete, brick, blacktop or cinders. Grass or sand is better.

Sharp Edges - Some sets have sharp edges or points where the parts fit together. Tape over these areas with heavy tape and inspect the taped areas regularly for weather damage.

Improper Anchoring - Legs can be set in concrete for stability. All types of anchoring devices should be placed below ground level to avoid a tripping hazard.

Sources:

Play Happy, Play Safely, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington D. C. (undated).

J. Van Horn, *Family Sociology Extension Specialist*, Pennsylvania State University, *PenPages*, July 1988.

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