



Playgrounds: Safety Activity Checkpoints



Playing is just as much a fun activity for kids as it is a critically important part of their creative and social development. [KaBOOM!](#) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure there's a "great place to play within walking distance of every child in America." With the help of sponsors and adults, the organization has developed hundreds of playgrounds in underprivileged areas.

Safety is an important part of having fun on the playground. Each year in the United States, more than 200,000 children are treated in hospital emergency departments for injuries sustained on playground equipment. Injuries can be reduced by placing resilient surfacing below equipment, better maintaining equipment, improving supervision and using age-appropriate equipment.

Know where to play. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission provides a [Public Playground Safety Checklist](#) that aids with selecting a safe playground. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [Accessible Playgrounds](#) provides to people with disabilities.

Playground Gear

Recommended Gear

- Clothing appropriate for the weather
- Sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Sunglasses
- Portable drinking water
- Tissues and hand wipes

Prepare for Playground Activity

- ❑ **Communicate with council and parents.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- ❑ **Girls plan the activity.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- ❑ **Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints* for the recommended adult-to-girl ratios.
- ❑ **Compile key contacts.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- ❑ **Select a safe playground.** Inspect the site to be sure it is free of potential hazards, including rocks, roots and ground protrusions, and ensure emergency medical care is accessible. Physical activities are separate from more passive or quiet activities, and areas for play equipment, open fields and sandboxes are in different sections of the playground. Equipment and activity areas are without visual barriers, with clear sightlines everywhere on the playground to facilitate supervision. Traffic patterns are clearly separate for individual pieces of equipment. Moving equipment, such as swings or merry-go-rounds, is located toward a corner of the playground.
- ❑ **Ensure that playground equipment is safe.** Equipment is anchored so that it does not tip, slide, or move in an unintended manner. All wood parts are smooth and free of splinters. Wet or damaged equipment is not used. All metal edges are rolled or have rounded capping. There are no sharp points, corners, or edges on any components of playground equipment. There are no accessible pinch, crush, or tearing points on individual pieces of equipment. Protrusions or projections of playground equipment cannot entangle girls' clothing.
- ❑ **Assess safety of playground surface.** Hard-surfaced materials, such as asphalt or concrete, are unsuitable under and around playground equipment of any height, unless they serve as a base for shock-absorbing materials, such as a rubber mat. Acceptable playground surfacing materials are rubberlike materials, sand, gravel and shredded wood products.
- ❑ **Dress appropriately for the activity.** Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing dangling earrings, bracelets, and necklaces that may become entangled in equipment. Clothing is snug-fitting or tucked in to avoid snagging or tangling in any of the playground equipment. Wearing clothing with drawstrings on a hood or around the neck is not permitted.
- ❑ **Be prepared for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in First Aid, including Adult and Child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of abrasions, sprains, and fractures. Emergency transportation is available; if any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with Wilderness First Aid. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.

On the Day of the Playground Activity

- ❑ **Get a weather report.** On the morning of the playground activity, check weather.com or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate, and make sure that the ground is free of ice. If severe weather conditions prevent the activity, be prepared with a backup plan or alternate activity, or postpone the activity. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans for severe weather with girls. In the event of a storm, take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them.
- ❑ **Use the buddy system.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- ❑ **Girls learn about and practice safe playground activities.** Adults teach girls to use equipment properly, safely and as intended. Girls should not run, push, or shove on the playground. Girls should not stand close to a moving swing or other moving apparatus. Girls wait their turns to use equipment such as slides. Girls must not tease or play with neighborhood pets.
- ❑ **Keep track of girls' whereabouts.** Conduct a head count before and after playground activities. Ensure that girls know where to go and how to act when confronted by strangers or intruders and are able to sound an agreed-upon alarm.

Playgrounds Link

- Safe Kids: <http://www.usa.safekids.org>

Playground Know-How for Girls

- **Create your own games.** You've probably played capture the flag, hide-and-seek, and four square (www.squarefour.org/rules). What games can you create as a group?
- **Play it safe on the playground.** The [Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh](#) provides a playground safety checklist and a cartoon that covers important items such as keeping shoes tied and holding onto ladder rails.