



Better  
Kid Care  
Program

# PARENTS COUNT

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR PARENTS



# Keeping Kids Safe on the Playground

## Keeping your Child Safe Outside

Taking your child to the playground can provide some of the best free fun around. But the fun can end in tears or even with a serious accident. Some experts believe that nearly 40 percent of all playground accidents might have been prevented by careful supervision. Safe supervision starts with understanding child development.

Young children are beginners at life. Toddlers and preschool children think very differently than adults do. Instead of thinking things through ahead of time, young children think while they are doing things. They also do not apply what they have learned from one situation to another. Young children are often overconfident and will try things that are beyond their ability. Because of these limitations, all preschool children will do things that can lead to an accident on the playground. This means you must watch your child closely at all times when she is outside on the playground. Children under five must be at the playground with an adult; they can't be supervised by other children.

## Keeping Your Baby and Toddler Safe Outside

Crawling babies and toddlers are great explorers. They explore their worlds with their sense of touch and taste. But grown-ups must keep them safe while they are learning about the world around them. Young children

love playing in sand and water. While these can be great fun, they can also be a safety hazard. Drowning is a big danger, and most adults do not know that buckets, puddles, or toys with less than two inches of water can be a serious hazard. Safe supervision of young children means looking for standing water and never leaving your child alone with a water hazard even for a moment.

Because older babies and toddlers put nearly everything in their mouths, they could choke or eat something unsafe. Many children naturally mouth objects right up to the age of three, and often children who don't regularly put things in their mouths will do so when they are tired or hungry. Objects like acorns and gravel can be caught in a child's throat, causing choking. In fact, children can choke on any object that fits inside a paper towel roll. You can remove choking hazards when possible and stay close by to watch if children place anything into their mouths.

Older toddlers enjoy running, but they often run headlong and have trouble stopping or turning. This puts them at risk for crashing into things and falling. They also do not understand the relationship between size and distance. A child will see another child



approaching on a tricycle — or will see an approaching car — but not know how close the vehicle is to him or even that it is moving. Toddlers often don't have the motor skills to get out of the way to prevent some accidents. So show your children safe places to run and ride and keep children a good distance away from each other.

## Keeping Your Preschooler Safe Outside

From the ages of three to five, your child will be improving her motor skills. She will run and climb very well and most children of this age are adventurous. Preschoolers like to test their newfound motor skills by using the playground equipment in unsafe ways, such as climbing on the outside of railings, or trying to climb on the roof of playground equipment. Children of this age may seem to understand the rules but will not follow them. They may misunderstand directions because they cannot follow more

than two at a time. Start by setting some clear rules about how to use the playground equipment, right from the beginning. Talk about the rules regularly to help preschoolers remember them. While repeating yourself can be boring and frustrating, it is really important because preschoolers need clear reminders.

### Ready for a Trip to the Playground

Take a few minutes to get ready for your trip to the playground. This can help to avoid problems and let you and your child enjoy your time together. Take a first aid kit, water, wipes and towels, extra clothes, and diapers. Drinks and snacks can help make a day at the playground fun. Take towels to dry wet equipment. Toys and art supplies can help to keep everyone happy. Change diapers and ask everyone to use the bathroom before going outside—nothing ruins the fun faster than searching for a bathroom! Some of the best days that you ever spend with your children can be the simple fun of enjoying the playground together.

### Check the Playground First

Get into the good habit of walking all around the playground when you first get there. Look for broken glass, tabs from soda cans, nails, and big sticks. Check the equipment for vandalism, excessive wear and tear, and standing water. Dump any water and dry the playground equipment if possible. Look for puddles and supervise your child carefully around them. Children have been known to drown in less than two inches of water. Some puddles can be filled in with dirt. If this is not possible, keep children away from those areas and off equipment that has puddles around it. Never allow your children to use play equipment that is wet.

### He or She? Him or Her?

Please note: In this and all Better Kid Care publications we take turns referring to children as “he” or “she.” When we use he or she, we include all children.

# Teach Your Child to Play Safely

One of the best ways to keep children safe is to teach them the rules. But we should never rely only on rules for children’s safety. The rules are safeguards to be used together with good supervision. Children under age three do not understand rules, and older children cannot be relied upon to remember or heed them until after age seven. Rules are learned gradually through repetition.

Each piece of playground equipment that children use will have special safety rules. Teach your child the rules by stating them positively. Rather than saying, “Don’t fool around on the swing,” say, “Hold on with both hands.” Teach children the safe way to play on the following equipment:

#### Teach your child to use the swings safely:

- Sit in the center of the swing, never stand or kneel
- Hold on with both hands
- Stop the swing before getting off
- Walk way around the swing — not too close to the front or the back
- Have one person swing at one time
- Avoid swinging an empty swing, and never twist swing chains
- Supervise closely any child who would like to push another child on a swing, and teach him to push gently.

#### Teach your child to use the slide safely:

- Hold on with both hands as she goes up the steps of the slide, taking one step at a time
- Never go up the sliding surface or the frame
- Keep at least one arm’s length between children



- Slide down feet first, sitting up, one at a time
- Be sure no one is in front of the slide before sliding down
- Be patient, avoid pushing or shoving, and wait his turn
- Leave the bottom of the slide after she has taken her turn
- Never use a metal slide that has been in the sun

#### Teach your child to use climbing equipment safely:

- Use both hands and hold with a strong, firm grip
- Be careful climbing down and watch out for those climbing up
- Stay well behind the person in front and watch out for swinging feet
- Drop down safely, with the knees slightly bent, and land on both feet

**Please remember:** Children are not good at spacing themselves far enough away from each other. Many injuries occur when children are too close. You need to watch carefully to keep the children spaced far enough apart when running or riding. Insist that your child wait to use playground equipment that is too crowded.

Supported by funds from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Pennsylvania Child Care/Early Childhood Development Training System, Developed by the Penn State Better Kid Care Program 253 Easterly Parkway, State College, PA 16801 • Phone: 1-800-452-9108 • Website: betterkidcare.psu.edu.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its work force.

PENNSTATE



Cooperative Extension  
College of Agricultural Sciences

April 11, 2002

