

PLAYGROUND SAFETY INVESTIGATION FOR A SAFE SUMMER



TEACHER BACKGROUND

According to Safekids Aotearoa every year close to 4,000 children are hospitalised due to a serious fall injury. These are not small scrapes, sprains or bruises, but serious injuries such as broken bones, spinal injuries and traumatic brain injuries.

Serious fall injury is also a major economic burden, costing New Zealand \$45 million a year in ACC claims costs. There are also social costs: disability, dependence on others, lost time from work and household duties by parents, kids missing school and sports, and reduced quality of life.

The good news is serious falls injuries are preventable—we can teach our students how to play safely so a fall will not ruin the fun for them and their family when the long Christmas break is upon us.

In this unit we encourage students to investigate their public playgrounds to identify dangers and causes of possible 'fall' injuries.

Tuning into the problem

- Does your class know what the leading cause of hospitalisation for children in NZ is? Ask them if they know. The top 5 are
 - #1 Falls
 - #2 Cycling
 - #3 Car crashes (as passengers)
 - #4 Riding motorbikes
 - #5 Pedestrian injuries
- Do they know how many are hospitalised because of a serious fall? (4,000 kids hospitalised a year is equivalent to one soccer team, or 11 kids, out of action every day).
- Do they know what the serious fall injuries are (broken bones, spinal injuries and traumatic brain injuries), and how much they cost (ACC and social costs to families)?
- Do they know that many serious fall injuries take place at public playgrounds? Ask them to think of reasons why. It can include:
 - * Pushing and shoving on playground equipment
 - * Preschool kids playing on playground equipment that is for big kids (and vice versa)
 - * Falling off playground equipment and landing on the wrong way
 - * Falling off playground equipment that is broken.

Research: Becoming experts in playground safety

Using shared reading techniques and/or group research, students can learn about being S.A.F.E. in playgrounds:

- **SUPERVISION**—adults must always be present so they can check for hazards, that children are wearing the right clothes, and check for children's behaviour.
- **AGE APPROPRIATE**—little kids play differently than big kids, so it's important that they have separate play area and equipment.
- **FALL SURFACE & HEIGHT**—playgrounds must have impact absorbing material (i.e. wood chips, mulch, rubber mats) that are in good condition, and upper body equipment (monkey and pull up bars) must have a maximum free height fall of 2200mm (220cm).
- **EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE**—playgrounds must be kept well maintained and not have broken equipment.

Resources:

- **Watch:** <http://bit.ly/playgroundvideos> (Videos on playground safety). *NOTE: Height and soft surfacing measurements in the videos are based on US guidelines—for NZ safety rules, see the S.A.F.E. checklist.*
- **Read:** The Safekids Aotearoa SAFE Checklist (see overleaf)
- **Additional reading for teachers:** NZ Standard Playground equipment and surfacing (NZS 5828:2004). Check with your school or public librarian for availability.

Using what we learned: Preparing for a public playground investigation

- Tell the class that they can make a real contribution to playground safety by investigating the condition of a nearby public playground using Safekids Aotearoa's S.A.F.E checklist. This can be done as a class, groups or by individual students.
- Have the students read it—Is there anything they think should be added?
- After the investigation, discuss the results with your class, and what you can do:
 - ✓ Write a letter or email the council that manages the public playground, to inform them of your findings
 - ✓ Have your activity featured in *Safekids News*—email the completed S.A.F.E checklist to campaign@safekids.org.nz or post to Safekids Aotearoa, PO Box 26488, Epsom, Auckland 1344

Turn to the next page for the S.A.F.E. Checklist

The **S.A.F.E** (Supervision, Age Appropriateness, Fall Surfacing & Height, and Equipment Maintenance) Checklist

Answer Yes or No.

Rate using stars (★★★★★ = excellent; ★★★★ = good; ★★★ = satisfactory; ★★ = poor; ★ = immediate attention needed)

School: _____ Room No: _____ Teacher: _____

Student/Group Name: _____ Playground Name & city/town: _____

SUPERVISION

- Is the playground designed so adults can easily see and engage with their children while they are playing? _____
- Is there a sign with a phone number that adults can call in case there are hazards in the playground? _____
- For playgrounds near a road: Is there a fence to stop children from running on to it? _____

Rate this playground based on adult supervision (1-5 stars): _____

• Comments: _____

AGE APPROPRIATENESS

- Does the playground have appropriate equipment for preschool children? _____
 - * If YES: is it clearly separate from play equipment for big kids? _____
 - * If NO: Are there signs clearly saying this play equipment is for a specific age group? _____
- Do you think this playground is exciting and interesting for your age group? _____

Rate this playground based on age appropriateness (1-5 stars): _____

• Comments: _____

FALL SURFACING & HEIGHT

- Tick the kind of impact absorbing material the playground has and the condition it is in:
 - Mulch, loose bark or wood chips
 - Measure the depth using a ruler—is it AT LEAST 300mm (30cm) deep? _____
 - Are there areas that require raking back (especially under swings)? _____
 - Rubber or rubber tiles:
 - Is it in good condition (no torn rubber or tiles)? _____
 - Other: What is it and describe the condition: _____
- Monkey bars must have a maximum 'fall height' of 2200mm (220cm). Measure the tallest monkey bar in the playground.

Does it comply with this rule? _____ (If no, write the measured height _____)



NOTE: You will need a measuring tool for this section.

EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

- Inspect all playground equipment. Are there broken parts or vandalism that you can see? _____
 - * If yes, identify what they are:
 - _____ - _____
 - _____ - _____

- Is the playground surrounding clean and well maintained (no broken glass, rubbish, overgrown trees or shrubs)? _____

Rate this playground based on equipment maintenance and surrounds (1-5 stars): _____

• Comments: _____

Overall, what rating do you give this playground (1-5 stars)?: _____

Comments and suggestions to improve this playground: _____
