

PLAYGROUND SUPERVISION

Playground Supervision Reduces Injuries



Melinda Bossenmeyer, Ed.D.
President/Founder
Peaceful Playgrounds, Inc.

melinda@peacefulplaygrounds.com
<http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com/>



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It's not uncommon in an after-school setting for a child to sustain an injury. But proactive supervision and planning can reduce the likelihood of an injury that results in the threat of a lawsuit because of inadequate playground supervision.

Generally speaking, lawsuits against an after-school program or providers arise from an accusation that playground supervision was deficient, and because of those deficiencies, a child was unnecessarily injured.

The phrase lawyers use when talking about playground supervision is negligence because of a violation of the duty of care to keep children safe.

A claim of negligence reflects the accusation that supervision was lacking and contributed to the injury the child sustained. Duty of Care refers to the manner in which a reasonably prudent parent or educator would act in supervising children.

Playground Injury Research

The majority of playground injuries are minor and do not require follow-up and are accepted occurrences within the child-care setting. However, when a child is seriously injured and requires ongoing care or surgery, it is a different matter entirely. Fortunately, it is estimated that only 10 percent of injuries result in a major injury requiring follow-up care. In these cases, parents should be notified and advised that they should seek further medical care for their child.

Seventy percent of all school and child-care center injuries occur outside during recess, a structured physical education class or organized play setting. A review of injury data

has revealed that the lack of proper supervision is considered a contributing factor in playground injuries more than 40 percent of the time.

Peaceful Playgrounds Featured Article - [Playground Liability - Accident or Injury](#)



Accident or Injury?

Proactive Supervision


Generally speaking, when a child is injured it can be defined as either an accident or an injury. The notion of accident, which is described as instantaneous event represents the view that prior action would not have prevented it. An example of this would be when two children are running and bump into each other on the playground. Running is a typical playground activity, student interaction is expected and the collision was instantaneous.

Injuries, on the other hand, are often found to be preventable through established rules and active supervision, which is proactive to intervene in dangerous play. For example, if the two children collided because one tripped over a rake left by the custodian, then that would be defined as an injury because the situation was preventable.

Some states have adopted the Consumer Product Safety Commission's Playground Safety Guidelines that generally focus on a three-pronged standard of care:

- Supervisors must provide the highest duty of care to prevent unreasonable risk of injury.
- The playground design allows for gradual challenges and skill development.

- The playground is properly installed with adequate space to prevent overcrowding and ensure safe play.

Consumer Product Safety Commission - [Playground Safety Publications](#) 

Reducing Playground Liability

Proactive supervision refers to anticipating potentially harmful situations that might contribute to injury.

Proactive supervisors report to directors potentially harmful situations where injuries could occur, for example, surfacing fill product is low or non-existent; children are corrected immediately and unsafe behaviors extinguished; and fighting and wrestling results in consequences.

After-school program staff members who act in a supervisory role must be aware of policies for reporting repairs.

The majority of after-school programs take place in a school setting and reporting a potentially harmful situation may require a formal procedure.

Similarly, following up on the status of a repair request must go through the proper channels.

Thus, program directors must ensure that their staff members are aware of the procedures and that they are followed.



Proper Playground Staff Training



Play it Safe! Competent Supervisors are Certified!

Reactive supervision would occur on a playground that is not properly maintained, where supervisors are performing duty without training, and inappropriate behavior on the part of children is not extinguished or ignored. Thus, a supervisor would be taking action only after a problem or injury has occurred.

These situations can be reduced with proper attention to [training staff members](#) and reinforcing program policies. All programs should have a staff handbook or manual of policies and procedures.

While the policies may be reviewed with a new staff member during orientation, it is critical that rules be reinforced. This can be accomplished during staff training and meetings.

People Make the Difference on Playgrounds

Accidents can and do happen, but they are significantly reduced with well-trained supervisors and proactive supervision. Research shows that people make the difference on playgrounds. However, this difference occurs only when supervisors are properly trained and the program establishes rules and procedures for safe play.

Playground Supervision Tips and Techniques

Supervisors should be:

Duty tips:

“THE RECESS DOCTOR”
Melinda@peacefulplaygrounds.com

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- Aware
 - Calm
 - On time
 - Strict
 - Consistent
 - Fair
- Know the playground rules and boundaries and enforce them consistently.
 - Arrive early to supervision area.
 - Eliminate inappropriate behavior quickly.

Supervisors should be aware of:

- Inappropriate games, e.g., tackle football
- Chase games near playground equipment
- Team sizes, keeping games to an appropriate number of players (30 kids on one soccer field is too many and can lead to injury).

Supervisors should also:

- Require all parents or visitors to check-in through the office.
- Report strangers immediately.
- Get in close proximity to confrontations, intervene immediately and eliminate inappropriate behavior.
- Do not allow food or choking hazards in the play area.

Tips for supervising:

- Divide the play area into manageable areas for supervision.
- Strictly enforce off-limit areas.
- Close areas if you are short of supervisors.

Recognize if your role is as a play area supervisor or as an activity leader:

As a supervisor, avoid umpiring games, clustering together and joining into games with children.

A play area supervisor's role is to keep kids safe, not to be a play facilitator.

As an activity leader, leading the children or modeling the activity is part of the job.

Depending on the number of staff members available, your role may change from day to day.

References

Thompson, T. (August 1991). People Make a Difference in School Playground Safety. Executive Educator, 13, 28-29.

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