



• Nanuet (845) 623-7100 • New City (Eckerson) 352-5511 • Stony Point 786-5776

Playground Safety and Unspoken Parent Rules

by Erica Berg, MD



With nice spring weather the playground is a first social circle for most kids. This is a crucial time for both social development and healthy physical activity. But please remember it comes with a set of safety precautions and unspoken parent rules!

It's important to let your child explore the playground on his or her own. With that said, **don't** take your eyes off your child! Put away the phone, and watch your kids. Know if your child is getting into a dangerous situation or has conflict with other children, and be there to prevent it or intervene. Your child is your responsibility even from a distance. Naturally, children will make mistakes. You should never touch or reprimand another person's child. However, when you see another child behaving badly, you should alert their parent.

For their safety, please survey the playground before your child plays. The *National Program for Playground Safety* has provided us with a way to evaluate playgrounds at schools, parks and our own backyards. Each year over 200,000 children require treatment in the ER for injuries that occur on a playground. 40% of these injuries are due to inadequate supervision.

So, as parents we should all agree to adhere to the age limit. A properly designed playground will have a separate area for children under 5 years of age. In addition, set rules about using the playground equipment properly. For example: Do not let a child climb up the slides when other children are around. Sit on the swing rather than laying or standing on it. Climb the ladders one at a time. Have them learn to check for other kids in their way before jumping off equipment. Teach them to watch out for the swings. The swinging child can't control their momentum so the walking child has to learn not to walk near the swings.

For your own home playground and for evaluating public places, a safe swing set should have no more than two swings per bay, and should not be attached to any other equipment. It should be installed with soft lightweight seats (no metal, wood or "animal" seats). A soft "fall zone" should be placed in front and behind the swings measuring twice the height of the swing. All openings within equipment should be less than 3.5" or more than 9" to make sure their heads do not get trapped. The ground cover is an important factor in the severity and prevention of fall related injuries. Asphalt, concrete, grass, rocks and packed dirt are unacceptable. Mulch, sand and rubber matting are recommended. Of course maintenance is just as important. Be sure to check equipment for rust, loose fastenings, worn out parts and sharp pieces.

If we all follow these rules as a community, our children will all benefit. (Please refer to our website to read Dr. Berg's full article.)

We hope you find our Parentletter helpful and informative. Please keep in mind that receipt of this newsletter does not create a doctor/patient relationship and that it is not meant to serve as a substitute for professional medical advice. For particular pediatric medical concerns, including decisions about diagnoses, medications and other treatments, or if you have any questions after reading this newsletter, we encourage you to speak with your child's pediatrician.

Clarkstown Parentletter: Douglas Puder, MD,FAAP, Editor,Illustrator, Monica Hamburg, MD, FAAP, Asst Editor
Jeffrey Karasik,MD,FAAP Gregg Rockower, MD, FAAP Erica Berg, MD, FAAP