

# 10 TIPS FOR IMPROVING PLAYGROUND SUPERVISION



Melinda Bossenmeyer, Ed.D.

# Ten Tips for Improving Supervision on Your Playground

Serious accidents which occur in schools typically happen on the playground. In fact, approximately 200,000 accidents each year send children to the emergency room for treatment of an injury which occurred on the school playground. The following tips will help you to insure that children are safe on your playground.

## 1. Adequate Supervision.

The National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) recommends that the ratio of adult supervisors to children should mirror the classroom ratios. If class size is at 32 then there should be one playground supervisor for each 32 children. Yet, I rarely see this ratio maintained.

## 2. Staff Training.

Rather than thinking of how many supervisors do I need, it might be best to think about sending qualified and trained supervisors to the playground. In my travels around the U.S., most playground supervisors report that they have not received any training in how to supervise the playground. When a child is injured on the playground one of the first questions an opposing attorney will ask is "Were the supervisors trained?" It is generally accepted that they will receive training on how to effectively perform their duties.



**3. Playground Procedure for Emergencies.**

After the Sandy Hook tragedy, parents are looking for schools to insure students' safety inside and outside the classroom. Schools routinely conduct fire drills and other emergency drills monthly. Yet, few schools inform students of what to do should an emergency situation occur when they are outside. Check with an administrator for procedures to follow in this situation.

**4. Communication with Office.**

Use walkie-talkies or cell phones to keep in communication with the office. At least one supervisor on the playground should have a means of contacting the office and getting assistance out to the playground. Some schools purchase walkie-talkies for this situation. Other schools designate someone to use their cell phone should additional assistance be needed on the playground. It is important to point out that an adult should never leave children unsupervised on the playground even in the case of an injured child. Call the office or 911 for assistance and direction.

**5. Custodial Inspections of the Playground Daily.**

Schools are often used by outside groups in conjunction with "joint use agreements". It is not unusual for a school to offer an afterschool program on campus, which may or may not be affiliated with the school. Additionally, sports teams and athletic leagues often use school fields for practices and games. When the general public is allowed on campus after hours it is important for school personnel to inspect the field area each morning prior to students arriving. A quick sweep of the play area can insure that broken glass or other hazardous materials are removed.

**6. Choking Hazard.**

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has issued a warning regarding strings in hooded sweatshirts. Although this is less of a problem today than it was 5 years ago some sweatshirts still tie around the hood area and could result in a choking hazard should the rope get caught on a play structure.

**7. Supervisors Should Move Around the Playground.**

Playgrounds should be split into supervision zones. It is the role of the playground supervisor to move within their supervisor zone. Obviously, the number of supervisors may determine the number of supervision zones you implement. By splitting the playground into

zones, it allows for better positioning for supervising. Supervisors should be positioned in different supervision zones and supervisors should not be standing near to the other or conversing, as it draws their attention away from their assigned task.

**8. Supervisors are Not Play Facilitators.**

It is important to distinguish between the responsibilities and roles of playground supervisors and playground play facilitators. Playground supervisors have the responsibility of “keeping all children safe” on the playground. Play facilitators (on the other hand) have the responsibility of encouraging and leading games and activities. It is nearly impossible to effectively supervise students while also being tasked to organize games at the same time.

**9. Have a Substitute Playground Supervisors Guide.**

When an adult is brought in to supervise the playground and has little or no training it is beneficial to have a Substitute Playground Supervisors Guide available to them. This guide should list recess and lunch schedules, names of the administrator or supervisor to contact should assistance be needed, a listing of games rules, and playground rules and procedures, at the very least.

**10. Train Supervisors on What to do Should an Injury Occur.**

Playground accidents and injuries occur frequently on the playground. Some injuries require further medical attention by the school nurse or acting health clerk (sometimes the school secretary). When a student is injured it is typically best to leave them lying on the ground until he/she can get up unassisted or additional personnel is called. Pulling a child up may cause further injury.