



**Certified
Playground
Safety Inspector**

Watch Me!

The importance of good playground supervision.

We all know that public playground safety has improved significantly in the last 20 or so years. Today's playground manufacturers, designers, and installers are held to detailed safety performance requirements that have all but eliminated some of yesterday's most common causes of fatalities on playgrounds. Gone are the days (we hope!) when a brand new playground contained hazards such as entanglement, head entrapment, crush and shear points, protrusions, and impact from heavy swings.

All the advances in play equipment safety have been wonderful to see, but are they the end-all in keeping our children safe while playing, or is there more that can be done? Trained, experienced, and educated play area supervisors know that the answer to this question is: Yes!

Both of the leading industry standards regarding playground safety, ASTM -F1487-11, Standard Consumer Safety Performance Specification for Playground Equipment for Public Use, and the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission Public Playground Safety Handbook, recognize and note the important role playground supervision plays in the reduction of playground related injuries and deaths.

Children can be expected to use play equipment in ways not thought of or intended by the designers and in ways that make play more dangerous than it should be. Something seemingly as innocuous as wearing a bicycle helmet while playing on the play equipment can lead to dire consequences. Modifying equipment by tying ropes or dog leashes to it can also lead to injuries or even death. Hanging upside down for long periods of time, riding bicycles down slides, wrapping swing chains around the swing header, climbing on roofs, assisting children onto age inappropriate equipment, all can contribute to injuries that could have been prevented by competent supervision.

First time attendees at the National Recreation and Parks Association's Certified Playground Safety Inspector course often hear the statement that once they complete the course they will never look at playgrounds the same again. CPSIs and others trained and experienced in playground safety know that there is a significant difference between a risk and a hazard and that inappropriate use of equipment can turn an otherwise fun and safe play experience into a life changing event. Effective playground supervisors know when to step in to prevent an injury and when to step back and allow

children to develop the skills they will need later on in life through play. They know what a playground should look like and what the playground they are supervising does look like. They can spot any modifications or changes that have occurred over time, such as broken components, hazardous litter like sharp objects, degraded plastic that is brittle and cracked, missing components, etc., and they are willing and able to react to these changes by preventing children from coming into contact with these types of hazards.

Effective playground supervisors are also willing to stop children as needed when their play becomes dangerous to themselves or others. From throwing loose fill surfacing material such as sand, gravel, wood chips, shredded rubber, or engineered wood fiber at another child to excessive roughhousing or bullying, any form of anti-social, violent, or otherwise destructive behavior should be stopped at the first opportunity. Good playground supervisors know this would be a good time to assist the child's social development by explaining the consequences of their behavior and in so doing, preventing its reoccurrence.

Designers and owner/operators of unsupervised playgrounds, such as those in public parks, can assist in making caregivers effective playground supervisors through signage and providing good site-lines from the exterior of the playground into the interior and between the pre-school and school aged play equipment.

Important safety information can be conveyed to caregivers via signage. Signs or labels can describe what age group the equipment is designed for or how deep the protective surfacing material should be. Signs can relate the dangers of playing on hot equipment or playing on the equipment with a bicycle helmet on, or while wearing a hood with a draw string, or when wearing jewelry around the neck, or with bare feet.

Good, effective signage should be placed where it is noticeable and visible to caregivers/supervisors and should warn the reader of any potential hazards with enough advance notice to allow for preventive action to take place. Effective signage will also provide contact information of the owner/operator and be written in the language(s) needed to convey the information without need of a translator.

Competent play supervision at playgrounds is an essential ingredient in the recipe to make our children's play experience a happy one. Without it, the safety of the young ones is in jeopardy. With it, they can play and learn and return tomorrow to do it again.