



## Tips for Taming the Backyard Jungle

Each year, more than 200,000 children are treated in emergency rooms for injuries that occurred on playground equipment -- about 30 percent of these children were injured on play equipment found right at home. Most of these injuries could have been prevented. Sure, kids will be kids, but that's all the more reason why parents need to incorporate safety into their offsprings' backyard adventures.

Erie Insurance Group, one of the nation's largest property/casualty insurers, recommends the following **SAFETY** tips:

### Supervision

It is estimated that more than 40 percent of all playground injuries are related to inadequate supervision. "Adult supervision is just as important in the backyard as it is on the public playground," says Donna Thompson, Director of the National Program for Playground Safety.

This supervision starts with shoes and clothing. Insist that your children -- and their friends -- wear protective shoes. Also, make sure their clothing doesn't have any loose strings, which can get caught in play equipment and cause strangulation.

### Age-appropriate

Before you buy or build that jungle gym of your kids' dreams, make sure the equipment is appropriate for the age and size of your children. "Look at the height and the distance between any steps and rungs," Thompson noted. "Younger kids are getting on equipment that is just too big. They miss a step or grip, and fall and get hurt."

### Falls

Make sure the surface beneath the play equipment is a soft material to cushion falls, which are a contributing factor in 70 percent of all playground injuries. Hard surfaces such as asphalt, concrete, dirt or grass are unacceptable. Acceptable materials include wood chips, pea gravel, sand and synthetic materials.

### Equipment

Thompson also stresses the importance of making sure play equipment is properly installed and maintained. Equipment should be stable in the ground and there should be no exposed nuts, bolts or sharp objects. There should be no openings between 3 1/2 and 9 inches on any play equipment to prevent head entrapment. Parents should remind kids not to play on wet equipment and to watch out for hot metal surfaces, such as slides, that may cause burns.

### Tempering the Tramp

While trampolines are certainly exhilarating and aerobically effective, their popularity has added another pitfall to backyard safety. In 1996, hospital emergency rooms treated more than 83,400 youngsters ages 15 and under for trampoline-related injuries. Most injuries occur on home trampolines, and most of those happen when more than one person is on board.

If you already own or are considering purchasing a trampoline, consider these safety precautions:

- Check that the trampoline is installed correctly.
- Make sure the trampoline bed is level.
- Have impact-absorbing padding covering the top of the frame and the springs.
- Make sure the space beneath and surrounding the trampoline is free from hazards.
- Consider putting the trampoline in a pit, so that the bed of the trampoline is level with the ground, or installing an enclosure system.

When using the trampoline follow these safety rules:

- Always supervise people on the trampoline.
- Allow only one person on the trampoline at a time.

- Tell jumpers when they are moving away from the center of the bed.
- Get on and off with care. Slowly lower yourself onto the ground.
- Stay off the trampoline when it is wet.
- Do not attempt moves that are above your skill level. Keep in mind that most serious spinal injuries are associated with somersaults.

### **Establish common sense rules**

In addition to ensuring the safety of play equipment, parents should set guidelines for appropriate play behavior. Children of all ages need clearly defined boundaries and common sense rules. Review simple safety precautions with your kids, such as:

- Don't cross in front of moving swings.
- Don't push or pull others while playing on climbing equipment.
- Don't swing faster or climb higher than is comfortable.

### **Your turn to relax**

Once you've "jungle proofed" the backyard, pour another glass of iced tea, sit back and watch the kids and Rover play. After all, the dog days of summer have just begun!

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