

Playgrounds: Safety Activity Checkpoints



Playing is just as much a fun activity for kids as it is a critically important part of their creative and social development. [KaBOOM!](#) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure there's a "great place to play within walking distance of every child in America." With the help of sponsors and adults, the organization has developed hundreds of playgrounds in underprivileged areas.

Safety is an important part of having fun on the playground. Each year in the United States, more than 200,000 children are treated in hospital emergency departments for injuries sustained on playground equipment. Injuries can be reduced by placing resilient surfacing below equipment, better maintaining equipment, improving supervision, and using age-appropriate equipment.

Know where to play. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission provides a [Public Playground Safety Checklist](#) that aids with selecting a safe playground. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [Boundless Playgrounds](#) provides to people with disabilities.

Playground Gear

Basic Gear

- Clothing appropriate for the weather
- Sunscreen (SPF of at least 15)
- Portable drinking water
- Tissues and hand wipes

Prepare for Playground Activity

- **Communicate with council and parents.** Inform Girl Scout council and parents/guardians about the activity, including details about safety precautions and any appropriate clothing or supplies that may be necessary. Follow council procedures for [activity approval](#), certificates of insurance, and council guidelines about girls' general health examinations. Make arrangements in advance for all transportation and confirm plans before departure.
- **Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.

- **Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** The recommended adult-to-girl ratios are two non-related adults (at least one of whom is female) to every:
 - 6 Girl Scout Daisies
 - 12 Girl Scout Brownies
 - 16 Girl Scout Juniors
 - 20 Girl Scout Cadettes

Plus one adult to each additional:

 - 4 Girl Scout Daisies
 - 6 Girl Scout Brownies
 - 8 Girl Scout Juniors
 - 10 Girl Scout Cadettes

- **Compile key contacts.** Give an itinerary to a contact person at home; call the contact person upon departure and return. Create a list of girls' parents/guardian contact information, telephone numbers for emergency services and police, and council contacts—keep on hand or post in an easily accessible location.

- **Select a safe playground.** Inspect the site to be sure it is free of potential hazards, and make sure emergency medical care is accessible. Physical activities are separate from more passive or quiet activities; areas for play equipment, open fields, and sandboxes are in different sections of the playground. Equipment and activity areas are without visual barriers; there are clear sightlines everywhere on the playground to facilitate supervision. Traffic patterns are clearly separate for individual pieces of equipment. Moving equipment, such as swings or merry-go-rounds, is located toward a corner of the playground. The playground does not have rocks, roots, and other protrusions from the ground that may cause girls to trip.

- **Ensure that playground equipment is safe.** Equipment is anchored so that it does not tip, slide, or move in an unintended manner. All wood parts are smooth and free of splinters. Wet or damaged equipment is not used. All metal edges are rolled or have rounded capping. There are no sharp points, corners, or edges on any components of playground equipment. There are no accessible pinch, crush, or tearing points on individual pieces of equipment. Protrusions or projections of playground equipment cannot entangle girls' clothing.

- **Assess safety of playground surface.** Hard-surfaced materials, such as asphalt or concrete, are unsuitable under and around playground equipment of any height, unless they serve as a base for shock-absorbing materials, such as a rubber mat. Acceptable playground surfacing materials are rubberlike materials, sand, gravel, and shredded wood products.

- **Dress appropriately for the activity.** Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing dangling earrings, bracelets, and necklaces that may become entangled in equipment. Clothing is snug-fitting or tucked in to avoid snagging or tangling in any of the playground equipment. Wearing clothing with drawstrings on a hood or around the neck is not permitted.

- **Be prepared for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in First Aid, including Adult and Child CPR or CPR/AED. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.

On the Day of the Playground Activity

- **Get a weather report.** On the morning of the playground activity, check [weather.com](https://www.weather.com) or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate, and make sure that the ground is free of ice. If severe weather conditions prevent the activity, be prepared with a backup plan or alternate activity, or postpone the activity. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans for severe weather with girls. In the event of a storm, take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them.
- **Use the buddy system.** Girls are divided into teams of two. Each girl chooses a buddy and is responsible for staying with her buddy at all times, warning her buddy of danger, giving her buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help when the situation warrants it. If someone in the group is injured, one person cares for the patient while two others seek help.
- **Girls learn about and practice safe playground activities.** Adults teach girls to use equipment properly, safely, and as intended. Girls should not run, push, or shove on the playground. Girls should not stand close to a moving swing or other moving apparatus. Girls wait their turns to use equipment such as slides. Girls must not tease or play with neighborhood pets.
- **Keep track of girls' whereabouts.** Conduct a head count before and after playground activities. Ensure that girls know where to go and how to act when confronted by strangers or intruders and are able to sound an agreed-upon alarm.

Playgrounds Link

- Safe Kids: www.usa.safekids.org

Playground Know-How for Girls

- **Create your own games.** You've probably played capture the flag, hide-and-seek, and four square (www.squarefour.org/rules). What games can you create as a group?
- **Play it safe on the playground.** The [Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh](https://www.childrenshospital.org) provides a playground safety checklist and a cartoon that covers important items such as keeping shoes tied and holding onto ladder rails.