

“To Climb A Tree Is For A Child To Discover A New World”

Froebel, Education of Man 1826

Benefits of Tree Climbing

Climbing is an activity that children enjoy from an early age. Most children will climb just about anything: rocks and boulders, climbing walls, jungle gyms, furniture, and trees!

Children perceive climbing as fun and strive to accomplish reaching the highest point possible, overcome challenges and test their abilities. Climbing a tree can build confidence and develop coordination, problem solving skills, and strength. As children play together in a tree, their social, creative and imaginative skills are enhanced.

Children should be encouraged to climb safe trees. Playing outside in a tree gives them direct contact with nature and the tactile experience of touching different barks and leaves.

Children have a natural instinct to be cautious of heights. When climbing a tree, they will learn skills to seek out stable branches and determine the best route to take.



Selecting a Tree for Children to Climb

Good trees for children to climb have branches low enough to the ground for them to easily start climbing.

A safe tree for climbing needs to have strong branches that are not brittle. As a guide, branches that are 15cm in diameter are best for climbing as they will support the weight of the climber.

The tree must be healthy and safe from external hazards. It is recommended to seek advice from a tree specialist to determine the health and suitability of the tree. Check for an active animal, insect or bird nest. The tree should be appropriate to the skill and comfort level of the children.

Conduct a risk assessment which considers the following:

- Type of tree (species)
- Impact of climbing activities on the tree
- Position of tree (proximity to buildings, fences etc.)
- Age of the children who are likely to climb
- The maximum height children can climb
- Determine the number of children in the tree at one time
- Supervision plan
- Rules of the activity
- Playground surfacing at the base of the tree
- The benefits of climbing a tree for children

Refer to information sheet A Risk Management Approach for guidance.

Be mindful of intersecting branches that form an upright U or V shape and may be prone to splitting or create partially bound head and neck entrapment.

Obtain advice regarding removal of branches and protrusions identified as potential hazards.



Preparing a Tree for Climbing Activities

- ❑ **Inspect the tree before climbing:** Always conduct a thorough inspection of the tree for its health and for potential hazards before each climbing session. A tree that shows signs of wear or weakness is not suitable for climbing.
- ❑ **Remove obstacles:** Ensure that debris, toys and other potentially hazardous items are removed from around the base of the tree. Children need to be able to independently access the tree without assistance from ladders, steps or stairs.
- ❑ **Always be alert:** Unforeseen circumstances, such as a sudden gust of wind, breaking tree limb or an attack from a protective wildlife parent, make it imperative that you always be alert to danger. Always ensure a supervising adult is present when tree climbing.
- ❑ **Mark the limits:** Highlight to children the maximum climbing height by painting a mark on the tree branches. It is recommended to limit the maximum fall height to 1000mm above ground level.
- ❑ **Soft Surfacing:** Provide a soft surface surrounding and beneath the tree. Surfacing types include well maintained grass, mulch/sand (maintained at a minimum depth of 200mm) and vinyl covered foam mats.
- ❑ **Explain the Rules:** Children need to know the rules for climbing on the tree. These may include:
 - The maximum number of children in the tree at a time.
 - The maximum height children can climb. Whether children can hang or swing from a branch.
 - Respect the tree. The twigs and branches need to stay on the tree.
 - Shoes are worn when climbing trees.
 - 3 points of contact at all times.
 - That children can climb down by themselves.
 - That children are expected to watch out for others.



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