

What are Loose Parts?

Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials.

The theory of Loose Parts was developed in 1971 by Simon Nicholson who said that in any environment, the degree of creativity and inventiveness was directly proportional to the number of variables in it. Loose parts play encourages open ended play that allows children to use their creativity and imagination. It can be a low-cost method of providing children with many and varied play opportunities.

A balanced approach utilising risk/benefit assessment, consultation with staff, parents and families, and with the children, can guide what your loose parts play can look like.

What items can be used?

Loose parts can be anything from branches, sticks, small rocks, pine cones, shells, tyres, ropes, pvc pipe, logs, craters, seed pods, stumps – the possibilities are endless.

Consider asking your community to contribute items. Just make sure you check them over carefully before they go into the playspace.

Storage

Loose parts can look untidy. They might be a tripping hazard or even used for vandalism. Therefore it is important to consider how you can store your loose parts when they are not in use.





Loose Parts Safety

Make sure that loose parts play is happening on an appropriate surface, if all play is occurring where there is no climbing over 600mm then a surface such as well-maintained grass may be sufficient. However, if children are creating mountains or towers to climb (over 600mm high) then loose parts play should happen on an impact attenuating surface such as loose fill (bark chips) at the minimum depth of 200mm.

Active supervision is always recommended whenever loose play items are in use. Ensure boundaries and rules are identified with the children around how they play is always recommended.

It is important to complete a risk benefit assessment on loose parts. Keep this on file and update it regularly. Ensure all unreasonable risks are eliminated or managed effectively.

Other Helpful Factsheets

Kidsafe SA has a range of factsheets online. The following suggestions may assist with loose parts safety and planning:

- [Natural Playspaces](#)
- [Playground Safety Management System](#)
- [A Risk Management Approach](#)

Inspecting Loose Parts

It is important that regular inspections and maintenance of loose parts is performed to make sure no hazards arise from their use.

Things to look for could include:

- Broken or damaged parts.
- Tyres can harbour insects – paint the interior white to make visibility better, also check that the steel belt of worn tyres is not visible.
- Protruding nails and screws in wooden items.
- Sharp edges on rocks/PVC pipes/plastics and other materials.
- Heavy items like boulders should be secured/anchored.

Loose parts generally have no monetary value so disposal of broken, damaged or unsuitable items and replacement is usually preferred.

CONTACT KIDSAFE SA

Phone: 08 8161 6318

Email: enquiries@kidsafesa.com.au

Need more help? Kidsafe SA provides a playground inspection service. Contact us for a quote to organise an inspector to visit your playspace and provide specific advice.