

Well-planned and well-designed playgrounds have the potential to become well-used and highly valued community assets. Good planning and design will also help to eliminate hazards and reduce the risk of serious playground injuries.

It is always a good idea to seek advice or assistance from a professional with knowledge and experience in designing safe play environments for children. Kidsafe SA also encourages input and involvement from those involved in the use, construction and maintenance of the playground, including the children.

Site Considerations

Each playground site and location is unique, with different strengths and limitations. However, it is useful to consider the following points:

- **Access and entry to the playground** - can children and families get to the playground safely via safe pathways and entry points that avoid busy roads or other hazards? What about car parking, access for maintenance and emergency vehicles, prams, wheelchairs, etc.
- **Shade** - does the site have any mature trees for shade or will alternative shade need to be provided?
- **Water hazards** - is there a water hazard nearby or within the playground site? Good design can direct young children away from water hazards while supporting older children's access and enjoyment.
- **Other environmental hazards** - is there any poisonous vegetation, nearby industrial activity or other toxic exposure?
- **Slope and gradient** - is there a slope, gradient or any hills and gullies that can be used to advantage to embed slides or other play features?

Other Considerations

- **Drainage** - can rainwater run-off be used to create water play options, without impacting on other play features and general amenity?
- **Supervision** - Can be assisted by making the playground adult-friendly with shade, seating and maintaining lines of sight.
- **Flow of play** - Consider how children might move through the space and between different play features or activities and design to avoid conflicts of play.
- **Anticipated numbers** - How many children or families are likely to visit the playground? Maintain a balance between structures and free space to allow room for children to use and move within the playground, as well as space for families to sit and spread out if large numbers are expected.
- **Multi-age use** - If children from different ages and abilities are likely to use the playground, think of safe ways to include different types of play and different levels of challenge.



Designing with natural elements

There are many ways to incorporate nature into playground designs.

- **Wet/dry creek beds** - These can be created using sand or gravel, smooth rocks and reed-like plants and a slight slope or gradient. Providing water using a closed water system or even a bucket with a tap will create a further sensory dimension. Importantly, effective supervision is essential when young children play in or near water.
- **Mounds/slopes** - Using an existing gradient or creating a mound can create many natural play options. Slopes covered in soft lawn are great fun to climb over or roll down. Mounds can be created over a tunnel or a bridge. Slides can be embedded into a mound - a great way to cut down on safety surfacing requirements.
- **Sand/mud pits** - sand or mud pits and digging patches provide opportunities for many different types of play. Small children will explore the texture and quality of the material. Older children will create or participate in more complex imaginative or constructive play, making mud pies, tracks for cars and trucks or dinosaur gardens.
- **Plants** - Trees, shrubs, grasses and ground covers can play a number of roles in a play space. They can provide shade, wind breaks, semi-hidden quiet spaces or be used as teaching tools. They offer a variety of different textures, scents, colours, forms and sounds and are a great addition to the playground infrastructure. Choose plants that match the soil and climate of the site; and varieties that can be touched, picked, jumped over or occasionally jumped on.

- **Trees to climb or swing from** - If you are lucky enough to have one or two large trees in your playground you might be able to create a tree swing or give children opportunities to climb them using some simple safety guidelines. Contact us for ideas on how to do this safely.

Design consultation and development service

Kidsafe SA offers a Review of Plans service designed to give design advice, identify potential hazards and ensure quality play options for children.

We can also provide ongoing support services such as post-installation comprehensive inspections and annual inspections.



CONTACT KIDSAFE SA

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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.