

Play is an essential part of growing up. Children learn and develop as they play. Providing a safe and creative play environment is the best way to help them grow.

Many childhood injuries happen in and around the home, especially in the backyard and garden. Falls from play equipment cause many of the injuries in backyards.

There are Australian Standards for playground equipment and trampolines. Equipment manufactured and installed to these Standards can reduce the number and severity of play related injury.

It is important for parents to ask the question “Does it comply with the Australian Standard?” before purchasing backyard play equipment items for their children. Look for the Australian Standard information on the play equipment, instructions or packaging.



Safe Backyard Play

- Keep the backyard clear from rubbish and remove any trip hazards.
- Keep tools, equipment and chemicals locked away.
- Choose play equipment that complies with the relevant Australian Standard.
- Position play equipment in an area that is shaded, easily supervised and accessible.
- Ensure all play equipment and bikes are appropriate to a child’s age, size and developmental stage.
- Ensure play equipment is strong, sturdy and securely anchored.
- Secure any ropes top and bottom so they are not slack and cannot form a noose.
- Play equipment should not have sharp edges, splinters or protruding parts that could pierce skin, or tangle in a child’s hair or clothing.
- Regularly check play equipment for wear and tear.
- Remove loose cords from children’s clothing so they don’t get caught in equipment.
- Supervise young children on and around play equipment at all times.
- Fence play areas off from driveways and garages/carports.
- Ensure pool gates are self-closing, self-locking and well maintained. Regularly inspect fence panels and gates and leave nothing nearby for a child to climb.
- Remove any plants that may harm or cause illness in children.
- Supervise animals near children at all times.
- Don’t leave lawn mowers and electrical equipment unattended.

Cubby Houses

A cubby house is great for imaginary play. When purchasing and/or installing a cubby house consider the following:

- A cubby house set up at ground level reduces the risk of falls
- The design and location of the cubby house should not allow children to climb onto the roof or surrounding structures
- If the cubby house is elevated or has climbing equipment or a slide, then an impact area with soft surfacing is recommended
- To avoid head entrapment, gaps between vertical rails should measure less than 89mm for metal or plastic rails, or less than 75mm for timber rails
- Ensure that there are no sharp edges or splinters
- Do not use CCA or creosote treated timber.

Water Safety

Water play is fun and can be provided in a variety of ways.

- Supervise children at all times when they are in or around the water
- Always stay within arm's reach of your child when they are in water
- Learn basic first aid and resuscitation
- Keep pool gates closed at all times
- A pool fence is required for portable pools that have a filtration system.
- Cover garden ponds with wire mesh
- Empty containers such as buckets and wading pools when not in use

Safety With Dogs

Dogs are wonderful pets however they are responsible for some serious injuries to young children.

- Always supervise children near dogs
- Show children how to behave with dogs
- Choose a dog breed suitable for children
- Keep dog bowls out of reach

Driveway Safety

- Separate play areas from driveways
- Supervise children around vehicles
- See if children are near the vehicle before you take off.



Height of Play Equipment

Falls are the leading cause of injury in playgrounds. Australian Standards provide the maximum fall height of play equipment - the distance from which a child could fall to the ground. The recommended maximum fall height for play equipment is:

- 1m for children 0-3 years of age
- 1.8m for children 3-5 years of age
- 3m for children over 5 years of age

Equipment with a fall height greater than 600mm above ground level should have a soft surface (impact attenuating material) under and around to cushion any falls and prevent the risk of head or other serious injuries.

Surfacing

Asphalt and concrete are not a suitable surface underneath or around play equipment.

For play equipment in domestic backyards such as elevated cubby houses or forts, swings, slides, trampolines and rocking items, provide a soft surface under and around the equipment (impact area). Grass is suitable if well maintained, however can wear quickly in high use areas such as under swings and at the end of a slide. Consider installing playground mulch in these areas.

The impact area is the area under and around the play equipment onto which a child is likely to fall. The guideline for backyards is:

- 1.5m for 0-6 years
- 2.5m for older children

Swings

- Ensure swing frames are securely anchored into the ground. It is recommended that surfacing such as mulch is used in the falling space of the swing.
- Swing seats should be made of a soft flexible plastic or rubber.
- Chain links can entrap and crush fingers. Look for a swing that uses a short link chain or chain covered with a plastic/rubber sheath.
- Ensure the connections of the swing at the seat are not sharp or have protruding parts which could injure the child's hand or catch clothing

Trampolines

Trampolines require active supervision. Parents and carers need to implement safety measures to reduce the risk of injury.

- The trampoline should comply with Australian Standard AS 4989.
- Safety pads are installed adequately to cover the frame and springs.
- Netted trampolines are recommended as fall hazards have been minimised (pictured below)
- Locate the trampoline on a flat, soft surface and secure it to the ground.
- Provide a circulation zone of 1.5m surrounding the trampoline.
- Make sure there is a clearance of 5 metres above the trampoline bed.

Safe Use of Trampolines

- Allow only one child at a time
- Provide constant adult supervision.
- Older children need firm guidelines on proper use of the trampoline and skill development.
- Teach your child to jump in the centre of the mat and to focus their eyes on the trampoline to help to control bounce.
- Teach your child to climb on and off the trampoline rather than jumping off.
- Regularly check the condition of the trampoline frame, springs and bed for tears, rust, detachment and general weakening of the structure.





Effective Supervision in the Backyard

Good adult supervision involves careful, attentive monitoring of a child.

- **Constant supervision** means that an adult is always within sight and sound of a child
- **Intermittent supervision** occurs when an adult is out of sight and sound for up to 15 minutes
- **Periodic supervision** involves visual observation of a child at least every 15 - 30 minutes. The right kind of supervision will depend on the age of the child, the number of children engaged in play, the type of play, and the location of play.

Children 0 to 6 years of age need constant supervision during play. They are slowly developing understanding of balance, spatial relationships and how to solve problems.

Adults should:

- Allow exploration within appropriate boundaries under careful watch
- Provide reassurance
- Give simple explanations to help them learn why some things are "off limits"

Children 7 to 9 years of age have improved mobility and require larger spaces for play. They should have supervision during play.

Adults should:

- Be firm and consistent
- Take questions seriously and explain the consequences of unsafe play
- Explain how and when to contact an adult quickly in case of emergency

Children 10 years of age and older require intermittent or periodic supervision, depending on play activities. They begin seeking new play/recreation experiences that are more complex and may pose greater risk for harm. They still do not fully understand hazards and the potential consequences.

Adults should:

- Set and enforce consistent rules and explain the consequences of breaking those rules
- Explain how and when to contact an adult quickly in case of emergency

Inspection and Maintenance

Regular inspection and maintenance is essential to keep your backyard safe for children

- Check all play items for spiders and insects
- Check play items for damage, splinters, rust, detachments or weakening from exposure to the sun
- Repair or replace items as required or remove from backyard
- Check all play equipment items are securely anchored
- Check sandpits for contamination including animal debris

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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.