

Safe Play in Backyards



BACKYARD PLAY

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

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

There are Australian Standards for toys and domestic playground equipment such as swings, slides (AS/NZS ISO 8124) and trampolines (AS 4989). Items 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 toys and equipment for their children. Look for the Australian Standard ‘tick’ logo.



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 has the Australian Standard ‘tick’ logo
- 👍 Position play equipment in an area that is shaded, easily supervised and accessible
- 👍 Ensure all play equipment (including 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 to avoid a strangulation hazard.
- 👍 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
- 👍 Store machinery (such as mowers) and electrical equipment out of reach of children

child safety is no accident



HEIGHT OF PLAY EQUIPMENT

Falls are the leading cause of injury on playground equipment. The recommended maximum fall height for play equipment in the backyard is 2.5m (AS/NZ ISO 8124.6).

Equipment with a fall height greater than 0.6m above ground level should have a soft surface (impact attenuating material) under and around it to cushion any falls and prevent the risk of head or other serious injuries.

SURFACING

For playground equipment in 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.

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



The impact area is the area under and around the play equipment which a child is likely to fall on to.

The guideline for backyards is:

- a minimum of 1800 mm in all directions from the perimeter of stationary equipment such as climbing frames and slides
- a minimum distance of twice the height of the pivot point on a swing extended to the front and rear of the swing seat

SWINGS

- Ensure swing frames are **securely anchored** into the ground. It is recommended that surfacing such as mulch is used in the impact area 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. Look for the Australian Standard 'tick'
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Make sure toys and items are not stored under the trampoline.
- ◆ Do not let children access the trampoline by using chairs, ladders or planks.



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.
- ◆ 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.

For more information on trampoline safety *It's Flippin' Important* visit Product Safety Australia <http://www.productsafety.gov.au/content/index.php/tag/trampolinesafety>



CUBBY HOUSES

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

- A cubby house 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 safe 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 can hold more than 30cm of water
- Cover garden ponds with wire mesh
- Empty containers such as buckets and wading pools when not in use



SAFETY WITH PETS

Pets are wonderful however can be responsible for some serious injuries to young children.

- Always supervise children near pets
- Show children how to behave with pets - particularly dogs and cats
- Choose a dog or cat breed suitable for children
- Keep water bowls out of reach of children



FINAL REMINDER

- Separate play areas from driveways
- Supervise children around vehicles
- Check if children are near the vehicle before you drive off



SUPERVISION IN THE BACKYARD

Children of different ages and abilities will need different levels of supervision.

Generally, the younger children are, the more they need an adult to be close by to support and assist them. For young children, adequate supervision may involve children remaining in close proximity to the adult who is supervising them.

For older children it is important to balance the need for close supervision with respect for their age and developing independence.

The right type 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.



References and Resources

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Wyver, S. 2019. Letting kids play with discarded objects is great for their bodies and minds, and not as risky as you might think. [ABC Health and Wellbeing](#).

Kidsafe NSW Growing Kids Active Kids - <https://www.kidsafensw.org/growing-kids-active-kids/>

Kidsafe NSW information sheets - <https://www.kidsafensw.org/information-sheets/playground-safety/>



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
- Check all play equipment items are securely anchored
- Check sandpits for contamination including animal debris
- Check gardens for protrusions and low hanging branches
- Repair or replace items as required or remove from backyard



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