

# Playground Safety

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### Abstract

Falls are the #1 leading cause of nonfatal injuries in the United States for children aged 5-14. This teaching idea will assist teachers in educating students on the skills needed to prevent unintentional injuries on and around the playground and recreational settings.

*Objectives:* Students will be able to differentiate between safe and unsafe practices on the playground and also demonstrate behaviors that reduce the risk of injuries.

*Target Audience:* This lesson plan is designed for the elementary level and is more appropriate for Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students.

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Children should be provided with opportunities for unstructured play and physical activity during recess. For many students at the elementary level, this unstructured playtime usually consists of playing on the playground. The school playground is attractive to students of all ages, and is generally synonymous with children laughing, running, climbing, and swinging. However, it is also known as one of the main sources for falls and unintentional injuries.

In statistics provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), unintentional falls are the leading cause of unintentional injuries (36.8%) for children between the ages of 5 and 9 years old.<sup>1</sup> Children in this age range have higher rates of visits to the emergency department for injuries resulting from the playground (most of which occur in the school setting)<sup>2</sup> and it is reported that approximately 200,000 children in the U.S. under the age of 14 are being treated for playground-related injuries each year.<sup>3</sup>

Many measures can be taken by schools to improve the safety of their playgrounds. This can include, but is not limited to: creating softer and cushioned surfacing below the equipment, lowering the height

of the playground equipment, installing guardrails, and implementing regular maintenance and inspection of equipment.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even with the aforementioned preventative measures, it remains essential to teach students safe practices and appropriate behaviors for the playground.

## ***OBJECTIVES***

After this lesson, students will have the necessary skills to be able to differentiate between safe and unsafe practices on the playground, and also demonstrate behaviors that reduce the risk of injuries. Objectives for this lesson are based on the National Health Education Standards performance indicators, provided by the CDC (for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2):

### National Health Education Standard 1:

Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

- 1.2.4 – List ways to prevent common childhood injuries.

### National Health Education Standard 7:

Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

- 7.2.2 - Demonstrate behaviors that avoid or reduce health risks.<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, the students will be able to (SWBAT):

1. Provide a definition of being safe.
2. Recognize situations or behaviors that are unsafe.
3. Identify safe practices for physical activity and play around a playground setting.

### ***MATERIALS AND RESOURCES***

The following materials and resources will be needed to execute this lesson properly:

1. Poster board
2. Markers or crayons
3. Tape
4. Playground Area
5. Collaboration with 5<sup>th</sup> grade class/teacher

### ***TARGET AUDIENCE***

This lesson plan is designed for the elementary level and is more appropriate for Pre-K through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students. This lesson will require 1-2 class periods.

### ***PROCEDURE***

1. Pre-Assessment –  
Prior to the day of teaching this lesson, the teacher will use the Playground Behavior Checklist (see Figure 1) to perform a pre-assessment of each student's observed playground behavior.
2. Classroom Discussion -

Engage the students in a discussion by asking them the following guiding questions:

- By raising your hand, please tell me what is your favorite thing to do on the playground?
- When you think about being on the playground at recess or at a playground at the park outside of school, do you think of it as a fun activity? And what makes it fun?
- What can make it a not-so-fun activity (ex: possibly if someone falls or gets hurt)?
- Have any of you ever fallen down at the playground? If so, how did that make you feel?
- Did anyone cut in front of you to go down the slide or to get on the swing set? How did that make you feel?

### 3. Playground Safety Rule Review –

Question for written response:

What are some safety rules we should have for our playground?

Students will take approximately three minutes to write down two or three safety rules on a piece of paper. The teacher will then ask for volunteers to share what they have written down. The responses will be recorded on a large piece of poster board labeled 'Playground Safety Rules' to be displayed in the classroom. See sample list of rules (Figure 3).

### 4. Playground Role Play by 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students –

This activity is most effective if done on the playground so the students can see the role-playing in the real setting. However, these activities may be done in the classroom if playground is not accessible. A 5<sup>th</sup> grade class was chosen for this example, but different grade levels or classes may be suitable to perform for the younger students.

Examples of different conflicts/situations (unsafe practices) that can be acted out by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students:

Scene #1: A student ‘pushes’ another student on the playground equipment.

Scene #2: One student runs up the slide the wrong way and the other student sliding down collides with them.

Scene #3: Two students bully another student to try to make them get off of the swing.

Scene #4: One student leaves their jacket drawstring or scarf hanging outside of clothing. \*(Loose clothing can easily become caught or tangled up on playground equipment).

Scene #5: A student cuts in front of another student on the rings and the first student falls to the ground.

The teacher will initiate a guided discussion after each of the different role-play scenes by asking the following questions:

- What is happening in this scene? What is wrong with this scene?
- How do you think this scene is unsafe and why?
- What kinds of feelings do you think the students have in this scene (for example, the person being pushed or bullied)?
- What needs to happen to make this scene safer?
- Do you think the fall or injury would have happened if the other student didn’t cut in front of them?

Students should be given time to play on the playground at this point in the lesson to practice what they have learned and make the connection that they can be safe and have fun at the same time.

5. Post-Assessment – See assessment technique below.

### ***ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE***

To assess whether students have met the objectives of the lesson, they will complete the activity sheet labeled ‘Safe Play on the Playground’ (Figure 2) to determine 1) whether they can provide definitions of being safe and 2) differentiate between safe and unsafe practices through their words and/or drawings. This can be done at the end of the lesson or assigned as homework depending on time remaining after playground role-play activity.

Additionally, the teacher will assess the students by using the same 'Playground Behavior Checklist' (Figure 1) that was used for pre-assessment. This post-assessment will indicate conceptual learning through observed behavior changes in the students.

## **REFERENCES**

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**FIGURE 1: CHECKLIST FOR PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>BEHAVIOR</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1. Uses playground equipment safely and for intended purposes. (Stays within guardrails, does not run on equipment, moves in appropriate direction on slides/climbing equipment, etc).			
2. Engages in positive play with peers.			
3. Respects boundaries and personal space of peers.			
4. Waits patiently for his/her turn.			
5. Does not cut in front of others.			
6. Follows all directions and rules of the playground.			

FIGURE 2:

## SAFE PLAY ON THE PLAYGROUND

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Ways that I can be safer:

1. I WILL \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. I WILL \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. I WILL NOT \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. I WILL NOT \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now color the pictures below. In the empty space, draw a picture of yourself being safe at the playground (hint: use one of the ways of being safe from above).



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**FIGURE 3: SAMPLE LIST OF PLAYGROUND SAFETY RULES**

- **Take turns on the equipment and wait patiently for your turn**
- **Respect your peers and their personal space**
- **Respect equipment**
- **Travel in right direction on equipment (ex: down the slide)**
- **Stay within guardrails**
- **Look out below you (make sure pathway is clear)**
- **Remove strings or scarves that can get caught in equipment**
- **Be positive**
- **Say no to bullying**
- **Do not hit, kick, or push**
- **Sit on swing, do not stand**
- **Listen to directions of teacher**
- **Report to teacher if a fall or injury occurs to me**
- **Report to teacher if a fall or injury occurs to someone else**