

# **The Murietta Bugle**

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Playground Safety and Supervision

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Winter is almost over and spring is approaching quickly. As the weather grows warmer and the days longer, more and more little feet will merrily tromp around our playgrounds. With the safety of our children in mind, our goal is to provide the citizens of Murrieta with basic playground safety information and remind our community caregivers about proper supervision.

In 1999, California began an assertive program to improve playgrounds and AB1055 was passed, which required certified inspectors to conduct audits on playgrounds. This law required inspector to search for; use zone infractions, head and neck entrapments, crush, pinch and shear points, sharp edges, protrusions and other safety concerns. According to Jim Holston, Director of Community Services for the City of Murrieta, the city utilized its own staff members to comply with the law and is in the process of updating their parks.

Did you know that each year more than 200,000 children are treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with playgrounds? When you consider how many children are injured, the importance of playground safety becomes clear. The severity of these injuries vary from broken bones to death and happen at playgrounds located in parks, schools, daycares, apartments and even fast food restaurants. Injuries occur from use of all types of equipment; climbers, swings, slides, seesaws and composites. Some hazards are brought to the playground, including; bike helmets, stringed garments, necklaces, binoculars or jump ropes. Playgrounds are created to accommodate children's bodies and items like bike helmets expand past those dimensions and create potential hazards, stringed garments or jump ropes may be used on playground equipment and may create a strangulation risk. Please be aware of what your children brings to the playgrounds and let's make sure that items that don't belong on the playground - stay off the playground.

Even with the development of safety standards and guidelines, laws, safer surfacing and maintenance of sites, injuries can and will happen. In an effort to reduce accidents the Parks & Recreation Department staff checks the 10 playground sites everyday, but a cautious supervisor will inspect a site with each visit. The followings is a partial list of items that should be inspected upon arrival:

## **Inspecting Surfacing**

As children use playground equipment, loose-fill materials (sand, wood chips and pea gravel) tends to relocate, especially in high use areas like slide exits and under swings. An ideal depth for loose-fill materials is 12 inches. Besides the depth of surfacing, you should ensure that no trash, glass or animal waste are present.

## **Inspecting Equipment**

Items such as chains, seats and other movable parts should be inspected for wear. As supervisors, we want to ensure that chains or wood structures are not excessively worn or damaged. Swing seats should not have any sharp points or exposed metal. Obviously, if there are damaged or missing equipment, children should not be allowed to play on or around the area – no matter how much they want to. Children view these areas as a “challenge” but for safety reasons, they should not be allowed to play on them.

### **Age Appropriate Equipment**

Children aren't aware of what type of equipment they should play on. In fact, all of it looks exciting and fun for them. The age appropriateness and proper usage of the equipment is something that a supervisor must have knowledge of. Due to physical and mental development, a 2-5 year old children shouldn't play on the following equipment; slides with more than 360° turn, chain or cable walks, free standing arch climbers, free standing climbing events with flexible components, fulcrum seesaws, log rolls, overhead rings, parallel bars, swing gates, track rides or vertical sliding poles. Knowing which equipment a child should play on and the proper use of equipment may also reduce the number of playground injuries. While visiting playgrounds many times we have seen a child climbing on the outside of tube slides, which may result in a fall and broken bones...or worse. As a supervisor, you want to make sure children are using the equipment correctly

### **Who is the Supervisor?**

With many parents' workings, the supervisor may be a teacher, recreation leaders, neighbor or even an older sibling. Many supervisors use the playground as a babysitter, which is a mistake. A supervisor may turn their back to a child or take a few minutes to read a book. Children move fast...very fast, and it doesn't take much time for them to find trouble. Playgrounds exist to enhance the mental, physical and the social growth of a child, but adult supervision is a must.

### **Final Notes**

It may take a few minutes to walk around a playground to ensure it safe, but considering you are making the playground safer for the children of the community, isn't it worth it? Let's make this spring and summer the safest yet.

Did you know there is a new state law in California (AB188) that does not allow for cigarette smoking within a playground area? Abiding by this law will promote a healthy example for our children – and prevent a \$100 fine.