

PlaySafe and Live Well!

Welcome to PlaySafe, LLC's informational column. Every month we will work hard to provide you with up-to-date information on topics related to parks, recreation, health, wellness, and physical education. Our hope is that by providing you with detailed information, you will go forward and positively change the world. If you have questions or comments, or if you would like to share your thoughts, please contact us through this web site. Thanks. Now PlaySafe and live well!

Is Your Playground Designed for Your Specific Needs?

It Can and Should be!

By Butch DeFillippo PlaySafe, LLC

I (Butch) have few regrets from my years of working for municipal governments, but I do have a silly one to share with you. As a Superintendent of Parks, I was tasked with designing and developing over ten parks' playgrounds that we had received funding for from a Class Action suit against a local developer. I met with community members and staff and had a rewarding time completing this task. The final park I was to coordinate the playground project for was Rainbow Park. I met with the community and staff and chose exciting pink and gray equipment. After we had installed the equipment we had a grand opening where the Director of Parks and Recreation came over to me and asked: Why is this equipment not multi colored? This is Rainbow Park. To Quote Charlie Brown - UGH!

When PlaySafe, LLC staff meet with many of our clients to discuss their new playground, they often do not understand the variety of choices that are available to them. End users should ask themselves many questions prior to purchasing playground equipment and surfacing. Examples of good questions can be:

Where are you going to install the playground?

Is it near a beach? The area around beaches causes metal equipment to rust very quickly. You may wish to use more plastics or composite materials. Is it in the sun in the southern part of the United States? It is very hot in some areas and all parts of the equipment can become hot enough to severely burn a child. You may want to provide shade. Is it in the woods and you want the playground to blend in? You can have equipment made that can not only look like a tree but has the same color and bark as the trees in your area.

Is the playground going to be used to identify your location?

Is your marketing going to show the playground as your show piece? Many childcare centers, schools, and parks use playground photos in descriptions of their facilities in their online examples or brochures.

Are you going to use your playground as a money maker?

Do you want to have a corporation, organization, individual have the opportunity to get their name out on your playground in a way that provides you with revenue?

Do you want your playground to be themed?

Many companies offer themed equipment. Just about anything you can think of is possible on a playground. We have seen many themed playgrounds such as; sea ships, dragons, space ships, tree houses, pumpkins, animals, and castles.

Do you have children with special needs?

All of us need some help sometimes and we should create playgrounds that everyone can use. Examples of unique design issues we have seen are; children with hearing impairments sometimes have hearing aids that can be damaged by the static electricity on plastic parts of playgrounds; some kids need a break from the activity and movement and quiet areas should be designed into playgrounds

Do you want natural elements?

Trees, grasses, water, and other aspects of nature are vital to our children's growth. If you are going to include them in your playground you should research how and when to use these types of elements.

How many children will be using the playground?

We have seen far too many playgrounds that were designed for less children than are currently using them. Always allow for growth of your programs and neighborhoods.

What is the age group of the children?

6-23 month, 2-5 year, and 5-12 year old children all have different needs and you need to design the playground for who is going to use it. We see many, many playgrounds that are being used by children for whom equipment was not intended.

What are your maintenance capabilities?

If you build it they will come. Can you keep your playground maintained to a safety compliant level?

Are you using the equipment to help children get in better shape?

Playgrounds can help with physical fitness for our children by including more upper body elements and movement equipment.

What type of surfacing do you want?

There are many benefits and drawbacks to different types of surfacing. You must think of the experiences you are trying to provide before picking the type of surfacing you will use.

There are many other specific questions that you will need to ask about your playground. A key component to having a correct playground is to have deep, meaningful discussions and thoughts prior to designing, purchasing, and installing the new playground. Please also keep in mind your maintenance and supervision capabilities. Remember, just like with any large purchase (for example, your car), you must take the time to ask yourself a lot of questions and provide honest answers. You will have this playground for a long time! One final question you should ask is: ***Did I do everything within my power to try to keep the children that are using the playground I designed safe?***