



UNIT-8 Toy and Outdoor Equipment Safety

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Make sure typical indoor and outdoor toys are safe to use
- ✓ Provide more confident supervision to ensure the safety of children
- ✓ Select toys that are safe and suitable for the age of the children in question

Unit 8

Toy and Outdoor Equipment Safety

Ensuring the Safety of Toys and Outdoor Equipment

Play is critical to a child's development and growth. Young children require numerous opportunities to play as well as a diverse range of high-quality, safe toys and materials to stimulate their imagination. Toys are an important part of every child's life, but they are not always safe to play with. While most toy manufacturers include important safety information on their packaging, toy safety entails much more than determining whether or not a toy is appropriate for children of a certain age. As a caregiver, the first step in protecting the children in your care is to carefully select safe indoor and outdoor toys and equipment that are appropriate for the children's ages and stages of development. To protect children from toy and outdoor-play-related injuries, proper use and care of these materials, as well as close supervision of children at play, are required. Knowing what to look for when purchasing toys and play equipment, how to maintain and store them, and properly supervising children are all important aspects of keeping kids happy and safe while they play.

Toy Safety

1. When purchasing toys, keep the following in mind:
 - Select toys with caution. Keep in mind the age, interests, and skill level of the child.
 - All toys for any age should have a good design and a sturdy construction.
 - Double-check that all directions, cautions, or instructions are clear to you and, if necessary, to the child.
 - Learn to read labels. Look for age recommendations such as "Not recommended for children under the age of three" and heed them. On fabric products, look for the labels "Flame retardant/Flame resistant" and "Washable hygienic materials" on stuffed toys and dolls.
 - Immediately discard any plastic bags or wrappings on toys after they have been opened.
2. When it comes to toy maintenance:
 - Inspect all toys for breakage and potential hazards on a regular basis. A broken toy should be repaired as soon as possible or discarded if repair is not possible.
 - Sand and smooth edges on wooden toys that may become sharp or have splintered surfaces. Regularly inspect all outdoor toys for rust or weak parts that could become dangerous.
 - Teach the child to notify you if he or she notices a broken toy.
 - Inform children that broken toys are not always safe to play with.

- Discard any broken toys or equipment.
3. When storing toys, keep the following in mind:
 - To avoid trips and falls, teach the child to put his or her toys away on shelves or in a toy chest after playing.
 - Look for safety features in toy boxes and chests. Use a toy chest with a lid that will stay open in any position it is raised to and will not fall on a child unexpectedly. Make sure there are ventilation holes for fresh air for added safety.
 - Before storing toys, clean and sanitize them (see *Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting* resource for more information).
 - Check toys that are used and stored outside on a regular basis. Toys or toy parts can rust or be damaged by rain or dew, posing a hazard.
 4. It is critical to provide responsible, consistent supervision of the child at play in order to ensure his or her safety and avoid accidents:
 - Keep an eye on how the child interacts with toys and others, and intervene if necessary to avoid injuries.
 - Keep track of which toys or materials the child enjoys playing with and how he or she uses them, and offer guidance on how to use them appropriately (and inappropriately) as needed.

Safety of Playground Equipment

Procedures:

1. Keep a close eye on the child on all play equipment to ensure that he or she is safe and using age-appropriate equipment.
2. Double-check that proper surfacing is used beneath and around playground equipment.
 - Mulch, sand, and rubber mats provide excellent fall protection. Each piece of equipment should be surrounded by surface material that is at least 12 inches deep and extends 6 feet around it.
3. Before allowing children to play outside, conduct a daily safety check to ensure that the outdoor play area, including equipment, is safe.
 - Swings should be placed far enough away from other equipment so that a moving swing does not strike the child. Each supporting framework should only have two swings, and they should be at least 24" apart. For a younger child, full bucket seats are recommended.
 - Slides should be securely fastened, with sturdy handrails and good traction on the steps.

- Between the slide and the platform, there should be no gaps. A bar should also be installed at the top of the slide, requiring the child to sit before proceeding down.
 - Spring-loaded seesaws are ideal for young children. A tire or other object should be placed under the seat of a traditional seesaw to keep it from hitting the ground.
 - Good handgrips are required on Merry-Go-Rounds, and the rotating platform must be level, free of sharp edges, and have adequate clearance.
 - Climbing equipment for toddlers should not be higher than 32". For children aged 4 and 5, horizontal ladders should not exceed 60 inches. Make sure the steps and handrails are in good working order, and that raised platforms are surrounded by a guardrail or barrier.
4. Look for sharp edges and potentially dangerous hardware, such as protruding bolts or open "S" hooks. Allow the child to play on the structure until it has been repaired if there are any unsafe conditions.
- Make necessary repairs or notify the person or organization in charge of the equipment's upkeep of unsafe conditions.
5. Make sure the child is dressed appropriately for outdoor play.
- Clothing with hoods or drawstrings that could get caught on equipment should be removed.
 - While playing, make sure the child is not overexposed to the sun.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Introducing Child Psychology: A Practical Guide, (2011), By Kairen Cullen*
- ✓ *Child Psychology: A Very Short Introduction, (2014), By Usha Goswami*
- ✓ *An Introduction to Child Development, (2009), By Thomas Keenan, Subhadra Evans*