

Playground Safety Tips for Early Childhood Programs

Melissa Lin: On today's webinar, we're pleased to have Tobie Barton from the National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety presenting. Now I'll turn it over to you, Tobie.

Tobie Barton: Thank you, Melissa. You can go to the next slide. I'm Tobie Barton. As Melissa said, I am the director of product development for the national center. I have been working in early childhood health and safety and injury prevention for almost 20 years now, and I have been certified as a playground safety inspector by the National Program for Playground Safety. I'm really excited today to talk to all of you about ways that you can make your outdoor learning environments safer for children. Next, please, Melissa.

The learning objectives for today's webinar are to, first of all, discuss the importance of a safe outdoor learning environment. We will talk about the common causes of playground injuries, and we will talk about strategies to improve playground safety. Next, please.

As many of you already know, there are countless benefits to outdoor play for children. We have research that shows us children who play outside regularly have healthier body weight, they have improved vision, they have improved immune function, reduced stress, better sleep, improved motor skills. The advantages go on and on.

We also have a lot of research that tells us that kids who play outdoors regularly have increased school readiness. This is because outdoor play contributes to better social skills. It helps children learn how to cooperate. It improves their attention span, it improves school attendance, it improves brain development. There are many physical and cognitive advantages to outdoor play. Physical activity plays an important role in supporting health and learning.

During times of increased respiratory illness in your community if you're seeing an increased spread of COVID-19 or the flu spending more time outside is also a really great way to reduce the risk of spreading germs.

Outdoor play is important to health and learning. That's the foundation of the conversation that we're having today, is we want children to be able to play outside as much as possible and as safely as possible. Next, please, Melissa.

It's important to remember that all of the learning that takes place indoors can also take place outdoors. Anything that you would encourage programs to do indoors has an outdoor component. The more that you can ensure that the outdoor environment is safe and provides age and developmentally appropriate challenges, the better the learning outcomes will be.

Reducing the risk of playing outside does not mean limiting the play equipment. It does not mean you are enforcing rules that restrict children's ability to move and explore their environment. In fact, it's the opposite. An ideal playground is one that encourages children to challenge themselves while also preventing little risk for injury.

You'll hear that theme a lot throughout our presentation today. We want to have playgrounds that are high challenge but low risk. In fact, studies show us that when playgrounds are high challenge but low risk, those playgrounds are the very best at promoting the goals of outdoor learning. Children get more physical activity, they develop better physical and cognitive skills, they develop better social skills, and they are happier and more resilient. Next, please, Melissa.

We have just a little poll that we're going to pop up right now. Olivia, if you can put the poll up, that would be great. Asking you if you know what is the most common cause of injury on the playground. Just take a moment to respond to the poll.

We'll give it just about 10 more seconds.

Olivia, you can go ahead and show the results of the poll. It looks like the majority of the respondents gave a pretty even split between falls from equipment and trips and slips. A few other people thought that maybe the most common cause of injury was collisions or broken equipment, and very few people answered strangulation. We can go ahead and close that poll. Thank you all for responding. You can go to the next slide, Melissa.

Those of you who answered falls are correct. Falls are the most common cause of injury on the playground. It's important to understand the common causes of injuries because that will help you prevent these injuries.

A few things that are important to know about playground injuries. Playground injuries are the leading cause of unintentional recreation injuries to children, and that's true for children ages 1 through 10. About 200,000 children each year are treated in emergency departments for playground injuries and falls from or onto or on playground equipment are the most common cause of injury. Falls are most likely to occur on equipment that is not appropriate for the children. It's not appropriate for their age or their developmental level. Injuries are most likely to occur when the surface onto which the child falls is not sufficiently shock absorbing.

There are a few pieces of playground equipment that are associated with the most injuries. This includes climbers things like monkey bars and overhead ladders swings, and slides. In fact, about 85% of all playground injuries occur on these three pieces of equipment.

Strangulation was on that previous poll, not because it's the most common cause of injury, but it is the most common cause of death on a playground. Fortunately, this occurs quite rarely. But when it does occur, it most commonly happens on slides and swings and involves ropes or dog leashes or drawstrings that get tangled around a child's neck. Clothing with drawstrings, necklaces, and bicycle helmets should never be worn on playground equipment, and equipment should always be inspected for any kind of entanglement hazard, such as a protruding bolt that could snag clothing or hooks that could catch drawstrings.

You need to know the risks involved on certain pieces of equipment and the safety measures needed to eliminate any injuries. That's what we're going to talk about more today. It's

important to have this data that you can make informed decisions to predict the types of injuries that are most common, and then you can take steps to prevent them.

Another important and interesting piece of data is that these types of injuries are most common during certain times of the year. Nationally, we see that September, April and May are the most common times when a child is injured on a playground. This may be because these injuries are most likely at the start of the school year. In the springtime when children may be coming back out to the playground after spending more times indoors during the winter. Children are reorienting themselves to the play equipment after a summer break or a winter break.

This data may look a little bit different in your local area depending on the weather pattern. But it is important to know that when children are less familiar with the equipment and when staff are less familiar with the children, injuries are more likely to happen. We can go to the next slide, Melissa.

I wouldn't expect each of you to be an expert in playground safety. The good news is that you don't have to memorize a lot of details or become an expert on all of the details of playground safety in order to create safer playgrounds. In fact, if you can work with your program to do just four things, you will take enormous steps toward minimizing the risk of playground injuries.

The four things that you can do to support a program in playground safety are to, first of all, plan for a safe playground. That includes safe and age - appropriate design, that the playground equipment matches the ages and the developmental levels of the children who are using that equipment. The second thing you can do is to maintain your equipment and to maintain impact absorbing surfaces that if a child does fall, the surface can absorb the impact of that fall and the child will not be injured.

The third thing is that you can implement inspections to identify injury risks and develop plans to resolve any issues that are identified. This includes having regular maintenance of your playground equipment. Then you can promote active supervision. We're going to talk about each of these four steps in detail. You can go to the next slide, Melissa.

The first step that we're going to talk about is planning for a safe playground through safe age and developmentally appropriate design. Next slide, please.

There are some key elements to playground safety that everyone in head start and early childhood programs should know. The first is that age - appropriate equipment provides children with the opportunities to safely practice gross motor skills without putting them at risk for unnecessary injury.

Earlier, we talked about having a playground that is high challenge but low risk. This is something that you can achieve by making sure that your equipment matches the age or the developmental levels of the children who are using that equipment. Children should not ever have access to equipment that is not appropriate for their age or abilities.

Children can't determine for themselves what is risky and what is safe. It's the job of the supervising adult to encourage safe use of equipment that is challenging but not risky. It's important to remember that age is not always a marker of developmental levels. It's really important to know your children, to know their abilities that you can make sure the equipment is safe for them. Next slide, please.

Children are far less likely to fall and be injured when equipment is used only for the age group for which it is designed. Sometimes equipment is marked with the age group that it is intended for. You can look at stickers or markers on your playground equipment, and often it will tell you if it was designed for 6 to 23 months of age, 2 to 5 years of age, or 5 to 12 years of age.

Sometimes, though, you and your staff need to make decisions about what equipment is safe for the children based on their developmental abilities and their age. Sometimes you may be using a playground that is not specifically designed for the children in your program, such as a municipal playground or an elementary school playground, you need to have a plan in place to make sure that children can only access the playground equipment that is safe for them based on their age and developmental abilities. Sometimes that means blocking off certain equipment that is intended for older children, or sometimes that means having staff making decisions about which children are able to play on certain equipment based on their developmental abilities. Next slide, please.

These next few slides just give you some examples of age - appropriate equipment for children based on their age. If you download the resources for this webinar, you will be given a number of resources that also list different examples of age - appropriate equipment.

For infants and toddlers, children up to 24 months of age, bucket swings are a great example of an age or developmentally appropriate piece of equipment. Slides, single - file step ladders, as well as things like ramps or spring rockers would be appropriate for children of this age level. Next slide, please.

For preschool - aged children, it is appropriate for them to use climbers that are up to 60 inches tall for them to use belts and tire swings or balance beams, or spiral slides that have one 360 - degree turn. That means the slide rotates a full rotation one time. Next slide, please.

Then this slide shows you examples of equipment that would not be appropriate for children in early childhood programs. That includes arch climbers, any climber or overhead rings or ladders that are over 60 inches tall, flexible climbers, track rides. School age is included here as a reminder that this equipment should not be on playgrounds for children in Head Start and early childhood programs. Or if this equipment is on the playground that you are using, you need to have a strategy in place to block access to this equipment.

There's also equipment that's really not appropriate for any age group, and that includes things like trampolines, swinging gates, climbing ropes that are not secured at both ends, animal figure swings, swings for multiple occupancy, which means more than one child is intended to

use the swing at the same time, and things like trapeze bars. That's equipment that wouldn't be safe for children on the playground. Next slide, please.

I want you to remember that the equipment where children are most commonly injured includes climbers, slides, and swings. Even when you have equipment that is safe and developmentally appropriate for the age of your children, you still need to make sure that equipment is maintained and that equipment has the proper safety mechanisms to prevent injuries.

That includes things such as, for platforms that are over 30 inches above the ground, the equipment should have guardrails or barriers to prevent falls. If there are vertical and horizontal spaces, things like guardrails or spaces between ladders, that space should be more than 9 inches wide and should be less than 3.5 inches wide or more than 9 inches wide. That is intended to keep a small child's head from getting trapped while preventing them from falling through easily. That's why the space should be less than 3.5 inches because no child's head will get through a space that is that small; or bigger than 9 inches, that if a child's head can get through, their head can easily go back through the same space.

You always want to check for any sharp points or edges. You want to check for nails or screws that are sticking out. You want to make sure that structures don't have rust or peeling paint, which could contain lead. If you're using a slide on your playground and the slide has a platform of over 30 inches, you want to make sure that there are rails at the top for children to hold and that there is some kind of structure at the top that encourages children to sit down before going down the slide. Any open slides should have edges of at least 4 inches high as children are going down the slide that they're not falling off as they're going down.

You also want to make sure that there aren't any rocks or glass or sticks or toys at the base of the slide that could get in the way of a child landing safely. You want to make sure that swing seats are soft, that they're made of soft rubber or canvas or plastic. Any swing that is made of hard material like wood or hard plastic can pose a threat of injury if it hits another child.

On swings, you want to make sure that the chains, those S hooks on the chains are closed tightly, that they form a figure 8 and you can't pass anything into that closure. A dime is a good piece of equipment to use to check that those are closed tight enough. And that ensures that a cord or fabric isn't going to get caught while children are swinging.

All of this material and equipment can be safe when it is initially installed. But if it's not inspected regularly and maintained, it can become unsafe over time. It's always important to make sure you're inspecting your playground equipment. Next slide, please. Melissa.

It's also important to remember when you're planning your outdoor spaces that you don't necessarily need special playground equipment. You can bring many of the learning opportunities that you provide indoors to the outdoor environment. This includes books and spaces for reading; this includes blocks, dramatic play materials. Anything that you use inside,

there are often opportunities to use those materials outside as well to encourage physical activity. Next slide.

You might want to think about how you can increase outdoor learning time, and you can do that by creating play areas and landscape features that promote exploration and discovery in a natural environment. This includes things like planting gardens, using loose parts such as materials for construction and pretend play, and you can use these instead of or in addition to traditional play structures or playgrounds.

An outdoor learning environment is also a wonderful opportunity for you to incorporate culturally significant motifs into your playgrounds. This may include planting a garden that includes native or culturally significant plants. You might want to add benches or murals that feature some artwork or cultural element that is important and meaningful to the communities that you serve. You can include weather - resistant shade structures to cover outdoor spaces, this will allow you to be outside even if the sun is not shining or if the weather is not cooperating. You can add picnic tables and outdoor kitchens and have mealtimes outside as well.

This slide just gives you a couple of ideas for things that you can do to incorporate outdoor learning that's not necessarily related to adding more playground equipment. There is a website that's included on your resources handout called the Natural Learning Initiative. It's naturalllearning.org. This resource has some really wonderful suggestions for enhancing outdoor child spaces and low - cost improvements and things that you can do to bring children outside in a healthy and comfortable and engaging way. Next slide, please.

Now we're going to talk about the next way to improve safety, and that's maintaining your surfaces and use zones on a playground. An important element of playground safety is impact absorbing surfaces. The playground surface is the material that lies under and around any playground equipment. The surface material that is under the equipment should be able to cushion a child's fall. Remember, we talked about falls as the leading cause of injury. Those injuries don't happen just because a child falls, but they happen because a child falls onto a surface that can't adequately absorb the impact of their fall. Proper surfacing is the best way to prevent injuries on your playground.

The first thing to know is that surfaces such as asphalt, cement, dirt and grass are never acceptable surfaces to have under playground equipment. Children who fall onto these surfaces have an increased risk of serious injury. The types of playground surfacing that is appropriate includes things such as unitary materials such as tiles or mats or rubber surfaces that are engineered to be shock absorbing. You can also use loose fill materials, including sand, pea gravel, shredded rubber, wood fibers, or mulch. And when these are installed correctly, they will also absorb a child's fall. There are some considerations to keep in mind. Things like pea gravel and sand are not appropriate for infants and toddlers. Next slide, please.

It's also important to remember that loose fill materials compress about 25% over time due to their use, due to weathering. As an example, if a playground requires 9 inches deep of

woodchips, you want to initially fill that playground with at least 12 inches of woodchips because those woodchips will compress over time. Loose fill materials are also very easily displaced in areas of heavy use, like the bottom of a slide or under swings. I'm sure you're all familiar with seeing the displacement of those materials.

The surfacing materials used in these areas needs to be checked daily, needs to be raked back into place if needed to make sure that they're maintained at the proper depth. It won't do you any good to have the right surface material if you end up with only an inch or two of that surface material at the bottom of a slide or underneath swings. You need to make sure that the surface material is maintained at a proper depth to cushion a child's fall.

If your programs children are spending a lot of time outdoors, you may need to check that surfacing even more than once per day and rake it back into place multiple times per day to maintain that proper depth. Next slide, please.

I know that the number one question that is received by the National Program on Playground Safety is, what's the best material to use on playgrounds? The answer to that question is that there isn't a single best surfacing material. The best surfacing is the one that your program can afford. It's the one that your program can maintain properly. It's the one that meets the needs of the children based on age and developmental levels. It's also the surfacing that's workable given the climate where your program is located.

While there's no perfect surface material, there are certain factors to consider when you're choosing the best surface for your outdoor playground area. You'll want to look at your budget. Loose fill materials like mulch and sand and pea gravel are less expensive, but they do require periodic replenishment. The pour - in - place rubber tiles and unitary surfaces are more expensive to install, but they may not require frequent attention.

You want to also think about the ages of the children who are using your playground. As you recall, sand and pea gravel can't be used for infants and toddlers because they might put it in their mouths and it could be a choking hazard. You also want to think about maintenance over time. If you don't have the capacity to check and rake your playground surfacing multiple times per day, it's possible that a unitary surface would be better for your program.

Climate is also really important to take into consideration. Sometimes surfaces get slippery when they get wet. If you have a lot of precipitation where you live, you might want a surface that doesn't get slippery. Sand is a surface that can get hard when it freezes. And there are certain artificial surfaces that get quite hot when exposed to the sun. You want to think about the climate in your area when choosing your surfacing material.

Then, of course, you want to think about accessibility. Very few of those loose fill materials are accessible for wheelchair users. Solid and unitary materials are best for people who are using wheelchairs or who have mobility impairments.

My number one piece of advice if you are thinking about installing new surfacing in your playground, is to do some research and ask the manufacturer of the surface that you're thinking about. If there's somebody else in your same geographic area who has used that surfacing, and then call that person and get their experience. If they've been using that surfacing for a year or more, they will have feedback for you on how well it works, if any safety concerns have arisen, how that surface has held up over time. And that feedback will be really important based on your specific geographic area and the weather conditions where you live. Next slide, please.

I also mentioned at the beginning of this section that it's important to maintain clear use zones. The use zones are basically the areas all around the playground equipment. For most playground equipment, this use zone extends 6 feet in all directions. For swings, the use zone is twice the height of the beam for those swings. And this means that you want to make sure that there aren't any fences or buildings or trees in the use zone. You also want to make sure that things like tricycles, toys and other children are kept out of the use zone while children are playing. This will help make sure that there's plenty of space around the equipment and can prevent collisions. Next slide, please.

I've talked a lot about understanding what level of depth you need depending on the surface that you choose, and how high platforms should be, and all of that information. That can be a lot of details and numbers for you to remember. What's good news is that you don't necessarily have to remember all of that. You just have to know where to look for answers to your questions based on the type of playground you are designing, the surfacing you're choosing, the equipment that you're using.

This purple book called the Public Playground Safety Handbook is an excellent resource on playground safety. It will answer all of the questions that you have about equipment and safety and whether it's appropriate for the children in your program. The book is available in English and in Spanish. It contains a lot of helpful checklists and resources, and it can be your source of expertise when you're planning a playground or if specific playground concerns arise in your program. Once again, if you download the resources for today's webinar, you'll see a link to this handbook. It's available for free. It's online you can search it easily.

There's also a version of the handbook called the Outdoor Home Playground Safety Handbook, and that's available for home - based programs. If you are a family child care home, it's important though that you review your state regulations, your licensing requirements, and standards to determine whether different standards apply to home - based settings where you are. Next slide, please.

The next thing that we're going to chat about is understanding the requirements for maintaining a program. Maintenance program that is proactive, will respond to any needs, any breakage, any needs for repair on your playground before an injury occurs. Next slide, please.

It's important that you use a daily playground checklist. Before the children arrive on the playground, you want to check to make sure that the playground is safe for their use. A

checklist would include things like checking that the playground is free of any debris, trash or water that may have gathered on the playground overnight. You'll check that the use zones are free of any obstacles.

If you're using a loose fill surfacing, you'll check that it's deep enough. You'll rake any displaced surfacing. You'll check that the platforms and the paths are free of any debris or tripping hazards. You'll look for any broken parts. You'll check the handholds and the barriers on your equipment to make sure that they're secure. Then you'll check for things like insects or nests, anything that is broken on the playground, any weather - related hazards such as a hot surface or an icy patch on a path. These inspections will help you make sure that your playground is safe every single day.

You may also use a longer monthly inspection checklist. That includes checking for things like loose or missing hardware, looking for any rust or sharp edges, replenishing any surfacing as needed, and checking the vegetation around your playground for any hazardous or poisonous plants. Next slide, please.

The most important thing is to use daily and monthly checklists that work well for your program. There are a number of sample checklists available. The Virtual Lab School, the Public Playground Safety Checklist are great starting places, but you want to adapt the checklist that it's actually responding to the pieces of equipment and the setup that you have on your own playground. You can also use information from an inspection by a certified playground inspector to help you identify items that should be inspected daily.

When you develop a checklist with your program, you need to make sure that any staff who are using that checklist really know what they're looking for, why it's important that they check everything on the playground, and how to address any concerns that arise. When you're developing your checklist, ask input. Make sure that the checklist is clear. Ask the staff if they have other areas of concern on the playground that they might want to add to that daily or monthly checklist. Have them try it out for a few days and report back on how well it works. Because if your staff who are using the checklist don't like the checklist, if they find it cumbersome, if they don't understand what the questions are asking, they may not use that checklist.

It's really important also to identify who is responsible for conducting daily and monthly inspections. It's important to have a few backup people as well if the person who typically does it is out for the day. It's important to know how the inspections are documented and who makes sure that they were done each day.

Then what's most critically important is to have a process for dealing with any identified hazards. You want to make sure that you know exactly what to do if something on the playground is broken. If something on the playground is in need of repair or if you find a hazard, who do you tell? How do when it's been fixed? How do you keep children away from that equipment while it is being repaired or while you're waiting for a repair? It's important not only to have a checklist, but to have a system in place to make sure that anything that's identified on

the checklist as a hazard is dealt with quickly and that you know when it has been fixed that you know when children can start using that equipment again.

It's super important to have conversations with other staff that if you identify a hazard, anyone else using the playground that day will know about it. It's important that the full management team, that your maintenance and facilities, staff, maybe even your policy council and your board are involved in planning and budgeting and monitoring that they know that there is the expertise and the resources available to plan for a safe playground. Then to follow up with maintenance and repair of any hazards that are identified. Next slide, please.

A really excellent resource for your playground safety is a certified professional playground inspector. You can find a certified playground inspector through a number of different websites. They have online registries where you can search for an inspector in your area.

The Caring for Our Children National Health and Safety Standards do provide some guidance on when you might want to use a certified playground inspector. Caring for Our children recommends that any time you install a new playground, you have an inspection done. Then on previously installed playgrounds, you should have a professional inspection done at least once a year by a certified playground and safety inspector or your local regulatory agency.

You should also have an inspection done any time that there are changes made to the equipment or if there are changes in the intended users. Maybe you have opened your program up to infants and toddlers who are not previously using your playground, you would want to have an inspection done to make sure that playground is safe for the ages that are now using your playground.

You can learn a lot from an inspector's complete inspection. They will give you a report afterwards that will identify hazards. They will let you know what playground equipment may need maintenance coming up. They will also prioritize corrective actions. Let's you know what pieces of equipment need attention right away versus those pieces of equipment that you may want to keep an eye on and plan for some repairs or maintenance over time. You should always make sure that your management team is engaged in reviewing those inspection reports and that there is a plan to identify and address any concerns that the inspector has.

Another option is for your program to train someone as a certified playground safety inspector. A lot of programs will have somebody trained on staff. There's training that's available online. It takes just a few months. It can be done in a self - paced manner. Usually, there is a cost associated with the training, but it can be fairly reasonable cost. This is an allowable expense for Head Start programs to ensure that you have one or two people on your staff who are trained as playground inspectors. That's an excellent option that you can ensure you have somebody on your staff with expertise in playground safety. Next slide, please.

We're going to talk now about the fourth way to improve safety on the playground. This is what I think of as the most important and critical step to playground safety, and that is to promote active supervision. Next slide, please.

The reason I think it's the most important strategy is that even the safest playground has potential for injury. The most important tool in reducing playground injuries is active supervision. Active supervision means that you are intentionally following six basic strategies. These include planning and setting up the environment to make sure you can see all of the children on the playground and to make sure that you have easy access to the children and the equipment.

One of the most important things to keep in mind on a playground is that an adult's proximity to children who are learning new skills is very important. An adult can help a child out if they start to fall or if they are using equipment in an unsafe way. You have to be close enough to them that you can intervene quickly if needed.

Also, really important in active supervision is positioning yourselves among all of the children in your care and changing positions as needed. You may determine with your other staff ahead of time which children on the playground you will be supervising. If something happens, if a child needs a Band - Aid or needs special attention, you'll communicate with the other staff on the playground and let them know. You'll say, "hey, I'm helping this child get a Band - Aid or manage an injury, can you keep an eye on the other children in my area until I tell you that I'm back and that I'm able to supervise again?" Teacher to teacher talk happens a lot on a playground.

Adults should be continuously watching, counting and listening to children at all times. Adults should be using their knowledge of each child's development and abilities to anticipate what they may do. You will know if you have a child who's really excited about climbing and has been practicing their climbing skills and maybe they need some extra support while they're working on developing those skills.

Adults who are actively supervising are able to get involved and redirect children when necessary. Allowing children the space and the ability to explore and to try new skills, but also intervene before an injury occurs and staying close enough to provide that active engagement and redirection when needed. Next slide, please.

A review of what we've talked about, because I know it's been a lot, the most important thing to remember is that outdoor play is good. It's good for your children. It promotes both physical and developmental and cognitive and social emotional advantages. You want children to be playing outside as much as possible and to be exploring in a way that is challenging but low risk.

It's also really important to be able to predict and prevent the common injuries. To remind all staff of the common injuries that happen on playgrounds. We know falls are the most common cause of injury. We can take a lot of steps to prevent those injuries by making sure that the equipment is safe, that falls are unlikely to happen. And that if they do happen, that you have the appropriate surfaces and use zones to prevent injury from any falls.

Important always to plan for those safe and age - appropriate playgrounds that are matched to the age and the developmental levels of your children, to make sure that you are carrying out

inspections and maintenance of your playgrounds and playground equipment, and that you are promoting active supervision at all times on the playground. Let's go to the next slide.

For the last few minutes of this webinar, I wanted to respond to some frequently asked questions that we get at the national center. These are questions that come in through our info line or questions that we've received on other playground related trainings that we have done.

One of those questions that we get asked a lot are the considerations for safe clothing on playgrounds. Safe clothing on playgrounds definitely includes wearing closed - toe shoes. This is true for children and staff because we always want staff modeling those safe behaviors on playgrounds.

We want to make sure that children don't have any drawstrings, necklaces, or scarves, or anything that could get caught on equipment and become a strangulation hazard. This includes something like jump ropes or pet leashes. Those should always be kept away from equipment.

Then you want to check equipment to make sure that any hooks or bolt ins or protrusions are not going to snag any clothing. You want to make sure that those hooks on swings are closed tightly and that any bolt ends don't have a place where clothing can get snagged.

If a child has been riding a bike or a scooter, we definitely want them to wear a helmet while they're on that equipment, but they should take their helmet off while they're playing on other playground equipment. Then, of course, always supervise children and check the playground before going inside to make sure that there are no children left behind. Next slide.

Another common question that we get through our info line is about the best way to separate play areas for children of different ages. There are a lot of different ways that you can do this. You can use landscaping. You can add hedges or bushes, you can add benches or pathways to separate different play areas. You do want to make sure that each play area is visible from the other to allow for supervision. If you're using hedges, benches, or fencing, you want to make sure that it's low enough that staff can see over it that they can see children in all areas of the playground.

The layout of pathways and landscaping of the playground should allow for distinct areas for different age groups. This would mean children who are infants up through age 23 or 24 months of age would have their own part of the playground with equipment that is appropriate for their age and developmental levels. And your preschool - aged children would have their own area of the playground with equipment that is appropriate for them. Having this separation and a buffer zone, some type of landscaping or shrubs or benches, reduces the chance of injury when older, more active children are running through an area that might have younger children.

Playgrounds should definitely be laid out to allow for caregivers to keep track of children as they move through the equipment. Visual barriers, as I said, minimize visual barriers as much as

possible. Make sure that one area is visible from the other area that you can always see what's happening on the playground. Next slide, please.

A super common question that we get is about when it's safe to play outside. The short answer is that you can play outside in almost any weather. It's important to partner with your families to make sure that children have weather appropriate clothes, to make sure that you have permission to apply sunscreen to children, or that families are applying sunscreen to children before they come to the program. Then you can check the temperature and air quality before going outside that you're prepared for how to dress children or for how long to spend outside.

Child care weather watch is a really great resource about what safe temperatures are for outdoor play. This includes temperatures that are warm, cold. The child care weather watch handout also provides information about how to factor in wind chill or humidity when you're considering whether it's safe to go outside.

You can look at a local air quality index tracker to find out if there are any recommendations on restricting outdoor play due to pollution or smoke. You may need to increase your shade structures if your playground gets too hot on sunny days, or you may need to install covered play areas if you have a lot of rain and snow to allow children to still play outside.

You want to always work with your families to make sure that every child has suitable clothing. You want to be applying sunscreen to children with families' permission. And you can also limit children's sun exposure by keeping them inside between the hours of 10:00 and 4:00 but may be spending more time outside in the early morning and later in the afternoon if possible.

It is important to remember that any amount of outdoor play is going to have advantages. Even if you can only go outside for a short time, maybe you can do that multiple times throughout the day to get children as much outdoor time as possible. You also just generally want to remember to check equipment and surfacing to make sure that it hasn't gotten too hot or too slippery or too cold, depending on the weather conditions. Then always watch for signs of heat exhaustion, such as increased sweating and thirst, cold, clammy skin, children who are becoming particularly irritable or complaining of muscle cramps or other signs, and make sure that water is available to children on the playground, especially when you're playing outside during hot weather. Next slide, please.

We also get questions about how to enforce safety rules on the playground. It is important that staff talk about playground safety rules often. It's important that staff talk to each other about safety rules and talk to the children. It's important to enforce those rules consistently, that staff are always modeling safe behaviors. Whenever you're re - engaging and redirecting children who may not be behaving in the safest way, that you talk about safety that they know why you're redirecting them. That may be something like, we're going to go play over in another area of the playground because it seems like you're having a really hard time sitting on your bottom while you're going down the slide. Let's take a break and maybe we'll return to the slide later when we can practice sitting safely.

You always want to make sure that children are using their playground equipment properly. On swings, this means that children are always sitting down, they're not swinging on their tummy or standing on a swing, only one child is using the swing at a time. Remind children not to run in front or behind of the swings. On slides, you'll remind children to wait their turn, that they always sit and they slide only on their bottoms. You want to remind children to play gently on equipment. That equipment, like monkey bars, is for climbing only. It's not for tricks or acrobatics.

It's also important, and sometimes folks don't know this, that you never go down the slide with a child sitting on your lap. This might seem like a safe way to introduce children to going down the slides, but we have seen examples of children's legs getting caught under the adult and then children getting hurt while they're going down a slide with an adult. Next slide, please.

Here's a list of some great resources for you. You have your resource handout, which should have a list of every resource that I have referred to today in this presentation. You can also find some other great resources on the URLs listed on this slide. There's a QR code that will take you to the ECLKC website where we also have other playground safety resources. I'm going to leave this up for just a moment. Then we have about five minutes left to answer some questions.

Melissa, I think we can advance to the next slide, which is just an opportunity to answer questions. I'm going to look through the questions that have come up and answer as many as I can. I do want to remind you that if we're not able to answer your questions today, please write into the info line. That is ECLKC and URL is health@ecetta.info. That is an email info line that is available to you at any time. You can write in with any question you have about health and safety in early childhood settings and we will get back to you. If your question isn't answer today or if you think of a question later on, please write to us and we can help you out.

First question that I see here is about swings for 6 to 23 - month - old children. The question is, does that need to be a belt swing? The best swings for children of that age are those bucket style swings, where they're set into the swing and their backs and fronts are supported. The swing should be made of a soft, flexible material. Sometimes you see those bucket swings made of hard plastic. Those aren't safe because if they hit another child, the hard plastic, of course, is going to cause more of an injury, especially if a child gets hit in the head. We do like to see those swings made out of a soft, flexible plastic.

Let's see. Have there been any changes in the use of single person swings? Only swings that are intended for a single child to use are safe to have on your playgrounds. We don't want to see swings that are built for more than one child to use at a time. Sometimes you will see swings like that. You will see animal style swings where there's a space for two children to sit on either side of it. Those swings really are not appropriate for early childhood playground settings because there's an increased risk of injury, not only because those swings are often made out of those harder materials, but also because when there's more than one child on a swing, there is more of an opportunity for one of those two children to fall off the swing or to be using the swing inappropriately.

Let's see. There was a question about playground safety in family child care homes and what the regulations are. I encourage you to check your own state or tribal, or local rules and regulations because those can vary from state to state. In some states, a child family care home can utilize the home safety playground handbook and those regulations are appropriate. In some states, those playgrounds, even if it's a home - based setting, they still need to follow the rules and regulations for center - based playgrounds. You'll have to look at your own state. That's an example of if you have a specific question, if you want to write to us at the info line and let us know where you are located, we can help you find the answer to that question.

Let's see. Question about recommendations for play equipment for mixed ages such as in home child care. Of course, there are many times when programs have children of mixed ages who are using the playground at the same time. Again, it's just important in those situations to have clearly divided space for younger or older children to make sure that younger children have access to equipment that is age and developmentally appropriate for them. Older children also have access to equipment that is age and developmentally appropriate for their use.

In a very small setting, that may mean that you just need to use supervision techniques to support children who are accessing the younger part of the playground and children who are accessing the older part of the playground. You may need to put up some barrier, like we said, a bench or a shrub or something can separate those two areas, but also allow you to continue to be supportive and to supervise those two areas at the same time.

We have a question about woodchips. Wood mulch is appropriate as a surfacing for playgrounds. You definitely want to check with the manufacturer of that wood mulch or those wood chips to ensure that they are safe for playgrounds. Because sometimes that wood mulch or wood chips can be made with certain chemicals that you may not want to have on your playground or be of different sizes where you really want to think about whether that wood is posing any kind of a choking hazard depending on the ages of the children who are using your playground. It's always important to check with the manufacturer and make sure that the material you are considering has been manufactured with the intent of being used on a playground.

Let's see. Someone has asked about guidelines for natural playgrounds. Natural playgrounds are wonderful because you can use things like boulders and tree stumps and hill slides to support outdoor play. And any of the considerations that you would have on other playground equipment still is in play in a natural playground. If you have some natural structure like tree stumps and that tree stump is over 30 inches off the ground, you want to make sure that you have the appropriate barriers and supports that you don't have children falling from that natural material.

Depending on how high those natural structures are, you want to make sure that you have the appropriate surfacing underneath those materials. Often the natural playgrounds are incorporating things in the environment that are low enough to the ground that you don't necessarily need to have the same type of surfacing. If it's a slide that's built into an embankment, it's OK if that embankment has grass on it because the slide is built directly into

that embankment and you're not going to have children falling from the slide. It really depends on the setup and the structure of your natural learning environment. The playground safety handbook will give you guidelines about height of the ground and when you need certain kinds of surfacing.

Let's see. I think I probably have time for one more question and then I'm going to turn it over to Melissa.

Let's see. Do toddlers have to wear a helmet on their tricycle? Our answer to that question is yes. Any time a child of any age is riding on a scooter, a tricycle, or a bicycle, they should wear a properly fitting helmet. Then that helmet should be removed before they go play on any other playground equipment. But this does include toddlers. There are often times when you can reach out to local community resources, such as bicycle shops or local public departments of health, and they can help you find appropriately sized helmets for your children to use. Please write to us again if you have any questions about how to find those appropriate helmets.

I think that's all the time that I have. I do see that we have a number of other questions I haven't had an opportunity to answer. Please write to us if you would like your question to be answered and we will get back to you. I'm going to turn it over to Melissa to wrap us up today.

Melissa: Thank you, Tobie. Thank you, everyone, for your participation and your great questions. We hope that you will write to us if you do have more lingering questions at health@ecetta.info.

This slide is the evaluation link. Please complete it. After you complete it, you will get your certificate. You can scan the QR code. We'll put the QR code up again at the end of the webinar. We just have a few closing slides to share with you.

A reminder, the evaluation survey is anonymous, and your feedback does help us improve future training and technical assistance offerings. Thank you again for spending a part of your day with us. If you don't already, please subscribe to our monthly list of resources using this URL. Follow us on social media. We hope you'll join us on MyPeers to continue the conversation with your colleagues across the country.

If you have more questions after today's webinar, please do write to us at health@ecetta.info. You can find today's resources and more in the health section of the ECLKC.

Here is the survey. It's the link, which I'll ask Olivia, if you could drop that into the chat again thank you or the QR code for you to scan. We'll leave this up for just a moment.

After you complete the evaluation, you will get another link to download your certificate. Thank you for the question, Giselle.

Thank you, everyone. Not to worry if you didn't catch the QR code. After you close after we close the Zoom today, you will get another link to the evaluation. You'll also get a follow - up email with a link to the recording, the resources, and the evaluation.

Thank you for joining. And thank you again to Tobie Barton. We hope you have a good rest of your day.

Tobie: Thank you. Thank you, Melissa.

Melissa: Olivia, thank you, you can close the webinar.