

**ACTIVE!**

Playgrounds and parks are favourite destinations for children of all ages. Unstructured play is essential for child development and important in keeping kids active and healthy. Today's neighbourhood play spaces may feature traditional climbing structures, modern manufactured play equipment with many unique designs, or equipment-free natural playgrounds with living landscapes. Playground designers are creating more innovative designs, using better surfacing, creating richer play experiences and encouraging more active lifestyles. Get out and explore your local playgrounds and parks today!

**and SAFE!**

Fractures and head injuries are the most common and serious injuries that occur at the playground, usually caused by falling from play structures. Many serious fall injuries can be prevented by following these supervision, equipment, and surfacing guidelines. Whether your kids are playing at the neighbourhood park, school playground, or on the backyard swing set, you can **ACT NOW** to prevent playground falls and injuries.

**KEY MESSAGES FOR PARENTS**

Visit [Family Action Guide: Kids Don't Bounce](#) for more information.

Actively supervise young children

- ✓ **Select the right equipment for your child's age and size**
- ✓ **Check for soft surfacing**
- ✓ **Teach your children playground rules**
- ✓ **Report safety concerns**
- ✓ **Consider natural playground alternatives**

**What COMMUNITIES can do to improve PLAYGROUND SAFETY**

- ✓ **Educate families and community partners about playground safety**
- ✓ **Provide safe play spaces that meet the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard**
- ✓ **Focus on reducing the height of play equipment and preventing falls**
- ✓ **Ensure adequate protective surfacing is installed and maintained**
- ✓ **Promote training for inspectors, operators and supervisors**
- ✓ **Consider natural alternatives**



✓ **Educate families and community partners about playground safety**

- Promote and distribute the **Family Action Guide: Kids Don't Bounce** to parents
- Promote and distribute this **Kids Don't Bounce** community action guide to day cares, community centres, schools and other organizations in your community who are responsible for installing and maintaining playgrounds.
- Use the family guide **key messages** in your media communications, newsletters, emails to parents and website.
- Send families and community partners [www.preventfalls.ca](http://www.preventfalls.ca) to access more information and online links about playground safety and natural play.

✓ **Provide safe play spaces that meet the CSA standard**

- The CSA playground standard (CAN/CSA Z614 "Children's Playspaces and Equipment") is a voluntary standard for outdoor public play spaces and is considered the "gold standard" for public playgrounds.
- Make sure your equipment and play spaces meet the CSA standard by using an inspector certified by the Canadian Playground Safety Institute (see training below).
- The CSA standard also specifies maintenance criteria, and requires that playground operators routinely inspect playgrounds for new hazards that may arise, such as worn surfacing or broken equipment.
- If injuries occur on public play equipment, the incident information should be reported to Health Canada. The Hazardous Products Act requires that injuries related to consumer products such as these must be reported. Go <http://health.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/consumer-product-safety/advisories-warnings-recalls/report-incident-involving-consumer-product-a.html> to report incidents.

✓ **Focus on reducing the height of play equipment and preventing falls**

- Surfacing and fall height are the two main factors that predict the risk of a serious fracture or head injury.
- When selecting new equipment, choose designs that reduce the maximum fall height (this refers to the highest point from which a child could fall, when using the equipment as it was designed). --
- Avoid equipment on which children could fall from high open spaces or platforms. Choose equipment with high protective barriers, play structures that discourage climbing (e.g. onto the roof or up the outer structure, other than on a climbing wall), and/or feature fully enclosed spaces on the highest elevated platforms.
- Another option for reducing the risk of falls is the use of alternate play spaces such as natural playgrounds (see below) instead of traditional playground equipment.

✓ **Ensure adequate protective surfacing is installed and maintained**

- Surfacing and fall height are the two main factors that predict the risk of a serious fracture or head injury.
- Protective surfacing should be installed and maintained according to the CSA standard (CAN/CSA Z614 "Children's Playspaces and Equipment"). The standard can be purchased at [www.csa.ca](http://www.csa.ca) and includes detailed information on types of surfacing and how to test for impact absorption using a tri-axial accelerometer.

✓ **Promote training for inspectors, operators and supervisors**

-The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's [Canadian Playground Safety Institute](http://www.cpsionline.ca) at [www.cpsionline.ca](http://www.cpsionline.ca) offers a number of courses about the CSA playground standard. They also maintain a certified inspector directory online. The following courses are offered:

- Basic (introductory workshop for daycares, parent groups)
- Theory, practical (certification of inspectors)
- Inspection and maintenance (non-certification)
- Accessibility
- Train the trainer
- Consultant

✓ **Consider natural alternatives**

- Natural playgrounds are an increasingly popular choice for playground designers and communities needing to repair, replace, or purchase new equipment. Natural playgrounds should still comply with the CSA standard, which is designed to prevent falls, head and neck entrapment, pinching, and other injury hazards. So check your design ideas with a certified inspector or landscape architect, and be sure they meet relevant provincial guidelines, such as those established for schools and child care facilities.

**Resources**

Additional reading for natural play and play space development:

Outside Play: (<https://outsideplay.ca/>): This online tool helps parents and caregivers gain the confidence to allow their children to engage in more outdoor play

Innovative Playgrounds

([www.naturalplaygrounds.info/PDF/innovative\\_playground\\_research\\_report.pdf](http://www.naturalplaygrounds.info/PDF/innovative_playground_research_report.pdf)): this Government of Manitoba report provides case studies and a design matrix for creating innovative playgrounds, including many examples of natural play spaces.

Children and Nature ([www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)): this website has toolkits for families (nature clubs, family bonding) and excellent research summaries of the many health benefits related to play and learning in nature.

Green Hour ([www.nwf.org/GreenHour](http://www.nwf.org/GreenHour)): the National Wildlife Federation recommends that parents give their kids a "Green Hour" every day, in a garden, backyard, neighbourhood park, or any safe and accessible green spaces where children can learn and play. Check their website for lots of tips and tools for parents and communities.

Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood ([www.greenheartsinc.org](http://www.greenheartsinc.org)): this website features a wonderful guide for families (Parents Guide to Nature Play) with practical ideas for the backyard. It also has 25 ideas for early child care centres and 101 ideas for parents, as well as other resources, fact sheets and links about natural play.

Richard Louv ([www.richardlouv.com](http://www.richardlouv.com)): Richard Louv makes a convincing case that through a nature-balanced existence—driven by sound economic, social, and environmental solutions—the human race can and will thrive. View his site for a listing of his books on “nature deficit disorder” and resources to his blog and other related links on the benefits of nature in our lives.

## Ways to encourage families to play in nature

Here are a few ideas to get families out and active together, from the KIDS DON'T BOUNCE family action guide:

- ✓ Encourage running, jumping, skipping and hopping. Play tag or other active games with your child.
- ✓ Bring a ball, frisbee or kite. Large soft balls are great for kicking or playing catch with younger children. Older children can use a softball and glove or a frisbee.
- ✓ Play I Spy Nature, and have your child spot the biggest tree, count three leaves, find a flower or a pine cone. Run, skip or hop to the next item on your list.
- ✓ Bring a nature checklist, bug container, magnifying glass or binoculars.

Your organization can encourage use of local parks, paths and trails by creating **outdoor play kits** or **nature kits** for families that can be loaned from a community centre, library, school or child care facility.

- **Outdoor play kits:** include index cards with simple and fun activities and active games for families to do together, and provide a bag or basket of basic outdoor equipment such as soft balls of varying sizes, skipping ropes, small plastic pylons, and Frisbees.
- **Nature kits:** include nature checklists, scavenger hunts, or I Spy Nature ideas, and provide a bag or basket with a plastic bucket and shovels, nets, bug containers (e.g. plastic water bottle or jar with holes in the lid), and a plastic magnifying glass.

Host a **Play Day** in your local park. This is an unstructured or semi-structured day to meet at parks, play, explore etc.

