



Play Areas and Play Equipment

Many businesses such as pubs, restaurants, shopping malls and leisure facilities now provide play equipment and play areas. These can take the form of designated spaces where toys are provided, or large scale supervised adventure play areas which can be either indoors or outdoors.

Ensuring for children's safety requires a balance to be struck between physical safeguards and providing challenge and excitement. Commonly accidents occur because equipment has been poorly designed, incorrectly installed or inadequately maintained. However inadequate levels of supervision, the lack of appropriate age controls on certain apparatus/facilities and the misuse of equipment, are also contributory factors.

The following steps below will help you to ensure that play facilities are provided and used with the minimum of risk.

STEP 1 **Location:** Choose a site at ground level which provides easy access for children, adults with pushchairs and persons with disabilities. Avoid the need for children to have to cross car parks or roadways (outside) or pass close to busy areas or dangerous equipment inside. Consider the proximity of other facilities such as toilets and features such as glazing, low ceilings or light fittings.

STEP 2 **Design and Layout:** Consider providing different areas for a variety of age groups. Follow manufacturer's instructions to ensure that there are 'safe zones' around individual items of equipment and to avoid overcrowding within the area. Allow for movement between equipment and avoid blind corners and unexpected changes in floor level.

STEP 3 **Selecting and Installation of Equipment and Surfaces:**

- Select equipment which is appropriate to the age range of the intended users (it may be necessary to restrict some usage on the basis of size).
- Choose surfaces which are appropriate for the equipment and possible activities within the area. For example, it is recommended that where a child could fall more than 600mm, impact absorbing materials should be used e.g. PVC covered foam indoors or bark chippings outdoors.
- Purchase from a reputable supplier/manufacturer and check that equipment conforms to accepted standards. "Domestic" play equipment is not considered durable enough for outdoor or heavy commercial usage.

- Installation instructions must be followed. (Some equipment may require qualified installers). Conduct a post-installation safety check prior to first use.

STEP 4 **Supervision:** Encourage parental supervision by making play areas accessible and visible, and by providing comfortable seating. In supervised facilities, provide sufficient numbers of trained and competent staff, and make them clearly recognisable by their clothing. Security measures such as check-in procedures can also avoid overcrowding.

STEP 5 **Hygiene:** Outdoors, take precautions to prevent entry of dogs, e.g. dog-proof fencing and self-closing gates etc. Provide adequate litter bins and clean up all spillages promptly. Indoor facilities, especially ball pools, should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Use non-toxic chemicals which leave no dangerous residues.

STEP 6 **Inspection and Maintenance:** Devise, operate and monitor a documented inspection and maintenance programme for the whole play area. Remove, replace or repair defective equipment immediately, or take steps to deny access until a permanent repair is possible. Do not carry out DIY repairs or modifications. Train staff to carry out daily visual checks and more detailed recorded inspections e.g. at intervals of 1 to 3 months.

STEP 7 **Emergency Procedures:** Provide at least one safety notice which states what to do in the event of an accident/emergency or when equipment is damaged. Consider the provision of first aid facilities. Compile accident and complaint records and review them on a regular basis.



A 5 year old boy was cut across the neck when using a slide during a visit to a pub. An inspection of the play area revealed two loose ropes hanging over the slide, from a piece of netting in which there were holes wide enough to trap a child's limbs or head. The brewery were found guilty of failing to maintain equipment and fined £7,500.

■ **For Further Information:**

*Indoor Play Areas: Guidance on Safe Practice
ILAM/ROSPA/NFPA*

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