

Supervision – How much is too much?

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Forty four percent of the injuries on playgrounds can be attributed to improper use or lack of proper supervision. Everyone who takes the CPSI course learns that but we really don't spend a lot of time defining proper supervision. Public park agencies really don't have much control over improper use or the type of supervision that the children are receiving. About all they can do is to provide proper signage and maintain the equipment as well as they can. We provide a lot of advice on the proper wording for the signs. We advise the operators of the play area not to use terms like "supervision required" and recommend that they use "supervision recommended" because the owner/operator of the play area is responsible to provide the supervision if they use the term "required" but the term recommended puts the responsibility on the child's parent or care provider. The signs used in parks systems are pretty standard, most of them are the signs that are provided by the manufacturer and the owner simply picks one out of a catalogue.

Some cities get pretty creative about it like the one from Gilroy California that looks like a combination of traffic signs all collected on a single post. I guess they didn't hear the sermon about not using the word "required". It not only gives the basic playground information but it also informs the children about local smoking and dog regulations.

I have been doing a lot more inspections of schools lately and started a collection of the signs that I see on school playgrounds. Schools take the responsibility of playground supervision very seriously. We have a nude swimming beach in our community (unofficial of course) and we also have a few parks that are used for shall I say adult activities and I don't mean chess. I remember having a discussion with some of the recreation leaders of the department who were very unhappy about the activities that were going on and I mentioned that I thought they were just unhappy because they couldn't figure out a way to program it. If it can't be programmed or organized, it can't be recreation. Anyway, I was on a school one day during recess and the yard duty person had all of the children line up in a row at the transfer station. She blew her whistle and the kids walked up (walk up, not run) the stairs to the closest slide. They slid down and went back to the line for another turn. After a while she blew her little whistle again and the children stopped going down that slide and went to a climber. Same pattern, one by one quietly and orderly. I am sure it was safe but certainly not much fun and didn't create any social skills. It was definitely organized.

I went to another school and saw stenciled signs painted on the poured-in-place near all of the components; "EXIT" at the bottom of all slides and climbers and "ENTER" at the stairs. Somehow I always thought climb meant go up but at this school climbers are downers not uppers. I visited a school a couple of weeks ago that really got my attention. There was a large sign at each end of the play area with no less than 19 rules; 9 for the structure, 5 for the swing and 5 for a climbing wall. I won't give all of the rules but what impressed me the most were the rules for swing use.

- All students that want to swing must face the play Structure.
- There is no jumping off the swings.
- There will be two lines, one, on each, on the outside of the swings.
- The first person in line will count slowly (like we count for a drink at the drinking fountain) to 45. When they have counted to 45, the two people on the swings will slow their swings and get off NOT jump off.
- When the students get off the swings they must go to the outside, on their side to get in line again if they would like another turn on the swings.

Interesting grammar considering it was probably written by a teacher but I won't go there. The poor kids probably don't have any recess time left to play after they have read the instructions. Not only did they have the place posted for every rule imaginable but apparently, someone had explained to them about the use zone requirement of two times the height of the swing pivot point in front and back of the swings. They had little traffic cones spaced about 4 feet on center all the way around a perfectly laid out use zone configuration. No one is going to accuse them of lack of supervision.

The kids of course have their opinion about the rules. One student wrote his opinion on the sign, **“School is So Not Cool”**