

Inspection Etiquette

by David Spease, ASLA, CPSI

When you complete the NPSI Certified Playground Safety Inspector course you are expected to be able to identify safety hazards, rank the hazard according to injury potential and apply the knowledge you have learned to establish a comprehensive playground safety program. You are asked to agree to a Code of Professional Practice that in summary requires the CPSI to sustain and advance the integrity, honor and veracity of their certification. Very little is said about inspection etiquette except when you go on the field trip you are reminded that there may be parents and children on site and that it is not appropriate when you find something that is non compliant to yell out “O my God, look at this. Kids are going to die.”

We have to remember that we are guests on the playground. We have been hired to inspect the playground by the agency that owns the playground but the parents and teachers that are there with their children do not know that. Most states have Amber Alerts to notify us that a child has been abducted and we have all heard about the things that can happen to children if we let them out of our sight for just a minute so it should be understandable that parents and teachers are very concerned when they see an unfamiliar man or woman on the playground. Even in California where it is a State law that all playgrounds must be inspected and approved by a Certified Playground Safety Inspector, very few parents are aware of the requirement and may not accept our explanation. Can you think of a better cover for a pedophile than to claim to be a playground safety inspector?

I have had parents call the police to report me even after I explain who I am and what I am doing on the playground. I have had parents shadow me around the playground because they thought I was going to steal or molest a child. Many of my clients are School Districts that ask me to inspect playgrounds at multiple school sites. Unfortunately they don't always explain to the school principals that I will be on site so I always request a letter of introduction that I can take with me to the schools. Schools in California and I assume all states are required to have a visitor policy that includes a requirement that all visitors register at the office before they enter the school grounds and most of them require the visitor to wear a visitor badge. Most schools also have a policy about taking photographs on the school grounds. They may require that you do not take photos during recess or they may require the children to stay off of the play equipment during the inspection. We must take photographs of the play equipment to document our findings but this process can be considered extremely invasive of the child's privacy rights if it is not done with sensitivity. It is important that you always ask the school if they have a policy about photos and to follow that policy.

When I do playground inspections I am careful to be well groomed and dress professionally. I wear a shirt with my company logo on the front and Certified Playground Safety Inspector on the back. I always introduce myself at the School office

or I have a small sign that I post when I am on a public site such as a park. The sign notifies people that a Playground Safety Inspection is in progress, and that Playground Safety Inspections are required by California Law. The sign informs people that photos are being taken and that they should request that the inspector avoid taking photos of your child or that you should remove the child from the playground during the inspection. I also have handout fliers with the same information as the sign to hand out to parents on site and to leave with the School office. The sign and flier also have my business contact information.

Always take the opportunity to be an ambassador for the National Playground Safety Institute Certified playground Safety Inspector Program and the importance of safe play. When people understand that we are there to help keep their children safe, they will be supportive and appreciative.