

Pools, Parks, and a Visit to the Emergency Department?

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Sunscreen and sweat, melting popsicles, and rumblings of late afternoon thunderstorms at the park signal the end to a day of Florida fun. Summer is just a few months away and this year more than ever, kids are eager to get back outside to play. Playgrounds can be a great place for kids to have fun, exercise and explore, but they are also a very common place for kids to get hurt. A slip on the monkey bars or cut on bare feet can transform an afternoon full of laughter to a trip to the emergency room.



One day in the pediatric emergency department, the first two patients were both injured while playing at the park. After 10 stitches, an arm cast, and a lot of crying, my patients were ready to go home, but not all playground injuries can be fixed this easily.

According to the CDC, each year emergency departments across the U.S. treat more than 200,000 children under 15 years old for playground related injuries, about half of which are serious injuries such as severe fractures, concussions, traumatic brain injuries, and dislocations. While less common, fatal injuries leading to death still do occur, and are more likely to happen on home playgrounds according to the CDC.

However, many of these injuries can be prevented.

The number one cause of playground deaths is due to clothing, strings, and ropes that get tangled. This can be prevented by making sure your child is not wearing any necklaces, drawstrings, or other loose objects or clothing that could get caught while playing in the park. This includes helmets which can get caught in playground equipment and cause strangulation.

With your child dressed appropriately, it is important to survey the playground for safety hazards. Look out for broken glass, sharp objects, potholes, and tripping hazards like rocks and tree stumps. Metal equipment, especially if it is in the sun, should also be felt to make sure it is not hot enough to burn your child.

When choosing what to let your kids play on, it is important to make sure you are choosing age-appropriate equipment, and that the equipment is well maintained. Elevated surfaces should also have guardrails and a soft surface underneath such as sand, woodchips, or a shredded rubber to prevent hard falls. Lastly, it is important to supervise your child, making sure you can see them at all times, especially on home playgrounds where most of the life-threatening injuries happen.

All of this information can be overwhelming to try to remember every time you take your kids to a park. An easy way to remember the key points is using the SAFE model developed by the National Program of Playground Safety:

- **S**upervision and Survey
- **A**ge-appropriate design
- **F**all surface cushioning
- **E**quipment maintenance

The more you practice using the SAFE model, the easier and quicker it will get, and

the safer the environment for your kids will be! Parks are not only fun, but they are important for your child's development. It helps them build motor skills, social skills, use their imagination, and stay physically fit. This is why park safety is so important - we need to do everything we can to create a safe environment that prevents serious injuries so our kids to grow and develop to their full potential.

For more information about how to keep your child safe call the Injury Free Coalition for Kids of Miami, a program sponsored by The Children's Trust, at 305-243-9080 or visit www.injuryfree.org.

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