PLAYSPACE IDEAS
FOR
LITTLE GREEN STEPS

UNDEARTAKEN BY
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KIDSafe WA
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KIDSAFE WA’S PLAYGROUND ADVISORY SERVICE

Kidsafe operates playground safety programs in Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia. These programs offer a range of independent consultation services in relation to children’s outdoor play environments.

Kidsafe Playground Consultants have professional backgrounds in areas as diverse as education, early childhood services, local government, occupational therapy, health science, social science and community development, as well as University of Technology Sydney Playground Safety Inspector training up to Level 3. Kidsafe Playground Units can provide:

- General information and advice about playgrounds
- Playground Development Consultation Workshops – for children, parents, professionals and community groups
- Playground Safety Professional Development Workshops – for local government, child care and education, landscaping, playground and maintenance professionals
- Playground Assessments & Audits – from on-site discussions to comprehensive audits with written reports. Recommendations include ideas and advice to ensure playgrounds are safe and fun without blowing the budget

The Kidsafe WA Playground Advisory Service (PAS) aims to encourage a balance between safety and appropriate playground challenge for children and does not promote totally ‘risk-free’ playgrounds. We provide education about how to avoid playground hazards likely to cause serious injury or death.

Members of the WA PAS team have a range of qualifications and experience and have worked with schools, community groups and local government, providing advice, information and professional development related to typical playground injuries, Australian Standards for playgrounds, playground maintenance and safety.

Kidsafe WA encourages playgrounds that support children’s development while keeping them safe from injury.

Kidsafe WA assesses playgrounds against Australian Standards and provides a report that details non-compliance, risks and hazards.

The Kidsafe WA Playground Advisory Unit is independent and not affiliated with any playground manufacturer, retailer or related organisation.
NATURAL PLAYSPACES

Natural playspaces use a blend of natural areas, environmental features and plants to interest children in learning about the wonders and secrets of the natural world. Swings and slides may still be included, but natural playspaces offer unstructured activities for learning and spontaneous play. Natural playspaces allow children to be spontaneous, active and creative. They provide for children of all ages and abilities, and for boys and girls alike. They promote light, moderate or vigorous physical activity that supports children’s growth and development.

There is a big movement in WA in the provision of a natural playspace. There are no set guidelines for what constitutes such a place, some organisations choose primarily landscaping such as logs, sand and rocks to create a natural playspace. Some local governments and schools are providing the same with elements of wooden climbing structures designed to sit with the natural environment.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN WITHIN PLAYSPACES

There is clear and consistent evidence about the many benefits for children and the wider community from exposure to and engagement with nature. Internationally, many public and private playground providers are moving to enhance playground provision by including planted landscapes and/or natural play elements into playground designs or by giving children opportunities to play in natural semi-wild spaces.

What the research says:

- Children who play regularly in natural settings are sick less often. Mud, sand, water, leaves, sticks, pine cones and gum nuts can help to stimulate children’s immune system as well as their imagination.
- Children who spend more time outside tend to be more physically active and less likely to be overweight.
- Children who play in natural settings are more resistant to stress; have lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety and depression; and have a higher measure of self-worth.
- Children who play in natural settings play in more diverse, imaginative and creative ways and show improved language and collaboration skills.
- Children who play in nature have more positive feelings about each other.
- Bullying behaviour is greatly reduced where children have access to diverse nature-based play environments.
- Symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder are reduced after contact with nature.
EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

The recently developed Early Years Framework for children birth to five years is aimed at enriching and extending children learning though the transition to school. Play is an important part of this learning process for younger children including those in Kindy and Pre Primary. The following is stated in the Early Year Learning Framework, 2009, p15-16:

- Spaces with plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud and water invite open ended interactions, spontaneity, risk taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS

Similarly the Draft Guide to National Quality Standard, 2010, p 53 states:

- **Element 3.1.3** Outdoor spaces include natural elements and materials which allow for multiple uses (Draft Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2010, p53).

PLAYGROUND STANDARDS SPECIFIC TO LANDSCAPING

- **AS 2155-1982, 4.3 Landscaping** –
  A flat featureless & treeless playground should be avoided. Wherever possible the natural landscape & suitable trees should be retained.

- **AS/NZS 4486.1:1997, 7.2.3.5 Design of playground** –
  Where a site is deficient in natural assets the design should provide contouring, grassing, planting with appropriate shrubs & trees, screening & variety of surfaces and changes of level.

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS
All playground developments and constructions should be built to the current AS4685:2004 Australian Standards for Playgrounds. These standards apply to manufactured playground structures. It is advisable to follow these standards as closely as possible when building or landscaping a natural playspace to ensure the safety of the children using them. The following is a list of ‘basics’ that should be applied and kept in mind when creating a new natural play area.

**Undersurfacing:**
All climbing equipment over 500mm in height requires impact attenuating surface. This can be in the form of loose fill or wet pour rubber. For a more natural element, washed beach sand, mulch or woodchips would work best. As a loose fill they need to be kept at a consistent 300mm depth. There is an exception to the 500mm rule – if there is a moving component such as a balance beam on chains and it measure under 500mm, impact attenuating surface is required.

**Fall Zones:**
AS4685:2004 has graduating fall zones depending on the height of the equipment. For example the fall zone for equipment that is 500mm high in Supervised Early Childhood (SEC) is 1500mm. The higher the equipment, the further the fall zone.

**Slides:**
Freestanding and attached slides require impact attenuating surface at the side of the slide and at the end of the slide. Embankment slides only require impact attenuating surface at the end of the slide. All slides need a clear 2000mm run out of IAS at the end of the slide.

**Moving equipment:**
All playground equipment that has moving parts such as swings, carousels, flying foxes etc. require a large amount of IAS and fall zone. If you are short on space these pieces of equipment should be avoided.

**Tyres:**
Ensure any tyres used in your playspace do not have any steel belting exposed. Paint the inside of the tyres white to discourage spiders from making them home, and drill drainage holes so water does not pool inside them. For tyres used for climbing, ensure they are stabilised in the ground so they don’t fall on the children.

**Rocks/Boulders:**
Rocks or boulders add a lovely natural element to a playspace. When choosing them, ensure they are reasonably smooth and that the sharper looking edges are buried into the ground.

**Equipment Height:**
The recommended highest for climbing equipment 0-5 years is 1500mm, Kidsafe WA suggest only 1000mm for children up to 3.

**Soil/Potting Mix:**
When planning kitchen gardens or a gardening activity for the children, it is preferable to use organic soil. Safety precautions such as children sized gardening gloves are recommended. Local soil suppliers should have a range of organic soil available.

**SAND PLAY**
Sand pits don’t have to be square and uninteresting. Dress them up with different borders such as logs, limestone blocks, boulders and landscaping. Children love work benches to play on, or sit on. Loose parts in and or around a sandpit give multiple play opportunities.
VEGIE GARDENS

Using a cost effective packing pallet to fill with soil and plant vegies in between the rows.
BIKE TRACKS
Installing different textures in sections of the bike path create more interest. Moveable wooden bridges placed along the track also add interest.
CONCRETE TUNNELS
Using Concrete tunnels for children to crawl/walk or ride through. Dress it up with planting or painted pebbles. You can also paint the inside black with blackboard paint for chalk drawing. Ensure they are stabilised in the ground. Face the opening towards the road in a playspace so you can see right through it.

INFORMAL SEATING
Children are very social and love to sit in circles chatting. These can be easily constructed using logs and timber off cuts.
AMPHITHEATRES

Amphitheatres are a great place for an outdoor class, a performance, an assembly or simply somewhere to sit and eat lunch.
CUBBIES

More informal cubbies that don’t have a door, roof and a window can be made out of timber. The open frame cubby on the left can have curtains and fabric draped over to create the closed cubby feel. Throw in a few big cushions and toys or books.
BALANCE BEAMS
Balance beams are fantastic pieces of equipment to install under trees and in places that the lawn doesn’t grow. Keep them less than 500mm in height and they don’t require safety surfacing.
WOODEN CREATURES
Wooden creatures and sculptures engage children in imaginative play.
MOUND SLIDES

Mound slide only require safety surfacing at the end of the slide for a clear 2000mm because they have no height to fall from at the side.
STEPPERS

Steppers are a great way to provide an activity that requires no soft fall area.

CREEK BEDS

Creek beds can have a self-reservoir pumping mechanism or a pump that attaches to a garden hose, all depending on your budget. Some do not require water at all.
Utilising fence panels, outsides of buildings or shed to install blackboard giving the children a play to draw with chalk.
MIRRORS
Perspex Mirror panels can be attached to the fence of the building. This would create an illusion or more space in the play area and children love to watch themselves in a mirror.
MUSICAL ELEMENTS

Fences are great places to install musical elements.
TYRES
Using tyres of all sizes to create equipment to play on, places to plant things or smaller loose tyres from wheelbarrows that children can move around easily.

PERSPEX TABLE
Outdoor perspex top table. The children can put paint directly onto the perspex and finger paint!
MURALS

Painting murals and games on pathways also create some interest for children.
LOOSE PARTS
The value of loose parts that the children can move around the playspace should not be underestimated. This allows the children to manipulate their play environment and create spaces and games using literacy, maths, and social skills.
NOTES