

The Watch Out List

You have heard lots about the equipment you should have in Playcentre, but what about the things that are not suitable?

This is a list of inappropriate or potentially harmful items with information on why these need close supervision, or indeed withdrawal from the Centre. It has been compiled as a result of ongoing discussions between Equipment Convenors from throughout the country, at Regional and National meetings. The 1995 National meeting merged the “Watch Out” list and the “Inappropriate Equipment” lists into this revised “Watch Out” listing.

It is supplied to assist each Centre/Association in making their own informed decision. This is not a statement of Federation policy. The list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it finite - add to it as you discover things that cause you concern. Remember that individuals can experience allergies to particular things - keep a separate list on display in your Centre.

The only item of equipment that is part of an official policy is from a 1991 Conference remit that requires Playcentre to be free of commercially produced War Toys;

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Note

Owners who have outgrown or no longer need them donate a lot of items to Playcentre - be aware that the item may have reached the end of its useful life. Also carefully evaluate if it is actually required or wanted by your Centre. Equally, items like books and puzzles not suited for Playcentre may be ok for

home use, but you need to carefully evaluate why you feel they are not suitable for your Centre, as that reason may affect their home use.

Not Negotiable Items

Equipment not recommended for both Health and Safety or Developmental reasons:

Baby Walkers/Exersaucers - there is always a danger that these will fall or be pushed over with the possibility of brain damage occurring to the occupant. Plunket supports this stand. The dangers of baby walkers are well documented. There are more stimulating things for these children to do within the Centre environment.

Polystyrene Packaging - particularly those that come off in small round pieces. Choking can easily occur, and if inhaled/swallowed it does not show up on x-ray. This includes all trays, cups, bells and balls.

War Toys - a Conference Remit was passed, 1991: “That Playcentre be free of commercially produced war toys.”

Linseed Oil - not for use in Centre’s. Cloths become highly combustible and if left in Centre they could cause a fire to occur.

Wind Instrument/Toy - one that is blown e.g. recorders, bubble trumpets, whistles etc. Saliva (spit) spreads many harmful viruses and diseases.

Borax – this is not to be used as it is highly poisonous.

Bread Bag tags – this is a choking hazard as they can break easily into small pieces. These are not to be used in play and are to be kept away from children at all

times.

Concrete Pipes - children get familiar in climbing/hiding in these pipes as a fun thing to do. When they see one outside the Centre, they think it is for playing in and could possibly fall down into storm-water drains. They may also potentially hold stagnant water (and perhaps harmful bacteria). When concrete starts to crack and break down there are often sharp edges. Concrete is also hard (non-flexible) to hit your head against as you bend down/run in, to enter.

Plastic Cling Wrap - An extreme choking hazard. Included in lunches and this is where the child is most likely to try to eat it (child eats food item without removing the wrap).

Medicine Bottles/Packaging - children recognise the bottles/packaging even though they cannot read the label. They may later try to play with real medicine and poison themselves.

Cleaning Products packaging – often empty boxes and bottles may appear in the Family play area. There may still be residue from boxes of washing powder etc that children may have the potential to ingest.

Tinfoil - particularly tinfoil plates. These may develop sharp edges when cut, with the potential to cut the child’s or adult’s skin.

Toilet Roll Inserts - potential risk of transmitting harmful disease. Not culturally sensitive/appropriate.

Stuffed Soft Toys - these become a hygiene risk to the child that chews or sucks them. Ideal breeding ground for saliva or runny nose spread germs. Not practical to wash toy between use by each child. Includes soft-bodied dolls.

Wood - tanned wood may be toxic and can be rough.

Drawing Pins - can often be found on floor where they have flicked out of wall creating a danger for standing on (sore for bare feet). If picked up off floor by small child they may place into mouth. A suggested alternative is to staple paper to walls or hang horizontal lengths of string by nails and attach Bulldog Clips to display notices etc.

Chewing Gum - possible choking hazard -difficulties removing from equipment or surfaces.

Rebounders (Mini Tramps) - these need to be on impact absorbing surface but are so often seen on concrete or indoors! These are a one person item - turn taking necessary. Jumping action is jarring for young bones. Over balance sideways if child lands on edge.

High supervision items

Alum - has in past been added to Playdough to make soft. Can be purchased in a 500gm block. Playdough does not require it to be added.

Playdough, for health reasons should be made fresh each session.

Balloons - once broken the balloon rubber can be a choking hazard. Place all bits into rubbish, do not leave lying around for young ones to find and place into their mouths.

Sharing blowing up of balloons is not recommended because of the health risk of mixing saliva. Recommend using a pump to blow up balloons. Be aware of children's allergies to latex.

Bannister Slides - parallel, sloping, sliding poles, spaced apart. Young children appear to lack upper

body strength to sit on top of these and instead slip through between the poles, hurting their shoulders.

Batteries - no small batteries that can be swallowed. Check batteries in torches, radios etc regularly for corrosion and replace as necessary. Toys requiring batteries must have a screw down cover.

Bean Bags - Must be washable surface (vinyl) and monitored for splits.

Throws and Chairs - Must be double sealed. Check for splits and discard immediately if outer seal is broken. Discourage using homemade or cheap varieties.

Bikes and Ride-ons - does not encourage group play, tends toward anti-social play. Some areas are better suited than others - any sloping area creates speed. Frequently available at home. High supervision required due to high numbers of toddlers around more collisions are likely. Smaller children walk in front of oncoming bikes. Need to provide helmets for safety. Helmets for role-playing. Small ride-ons for young children should have 3-4 wheels for stability. Have a special bike day if bikes not usually allowed at Centre sessions. Is a developmental skill.

Bouncinettes - small children may bounce them too hard. Easily tipped over, especially by mobile children. Old wire ones may no longer be suitable. Recommend newer models only if necessary.

Brittle Plastic - sharp edges and breaks apart easily; can scratch eyes and skin, small parts can be swallowed and toxic when burnt.

Buttons - small enough to be a 'foreign body' problem in ears, nose and throat. Should be used under strict supervision. Check buttons on dress ups and family play to ensure they are fastened securely.

Carpentry - of course ESSENTIAL, but requires close supervision to ensure correct use of equipment and that items do not wander away from area. Use a magnet to locate nails in grass or pick up off ground. Maintain sharp saws; they are less hazardous than blunt ones. Discard old 'creations' with nails in - do not return to the wood box. Provide untreated wood. Avoid custom wood and bought dry kindling as it splinters. Shoes should be worn in this area for safety.

Chain - if using chain on swings put a plastic sheathing on lower part so fingers cannot be pinched and crushed in links. This should also be the case for any other kind of chain that is available to children through play. Links of chain should not be provided to children as they may put it in their mouths and the potential for bacteria to be trapped is high. Contamination from the metal and germs could be dangerous to children.

Change Tables - ensure that the table complies with current Ministry of Education regulations and Consumer standards.

Clothing - cord and toggles attached to clothing. These can catch on corners while the child is playing creating a high risk of entanglement and potential for the child to hang themselves.

Computers - Should be used for mainly administrative purposes. Children's learning through ICT should be adult supervised and supported. Playcentre equipment and environment, with good adult supervision and interaction, will teach a child everything they could learn from a computer. Can become solitary play rather than cooperative play.

Cots - Portable cots are not to be used (Education (Early Childhood Services) regulations 2008). Cots must comply to current Consumer standards

Doors - slamming doors injure. Consider installing

door closers that shut gently or hooking back doors that need to remain open. Purchase a 'no-jam' safety device from a hardware store.

Dress Up Clothes - make sure all ties are kept short so they do not become an entanglement or strangling hazard. Use of Velcro or similar closure to eliminate ties for fastening. Avoid clothes that may become entangled or caught on something e.g. branches, when involved in play.

Equipment -be alert for damaged equipment. Review maintenance checklist for specifics. Remember indoor equipment as well! Watch out for lead paint, particularly on donated items. Monitor traffic flows. Avoid collisions by positioning equipment well. Equipment designed for an older child is often unsuitable for younger child because of the different developmental stages of the children. Heights of platforms can be lowered. You can have challenging equipment for older children without excessive height. Conference Remit 1992 - fall height from a structure to be maximum of 1.5m. Easels, tables & chairs should be properly sized for age range of children. Ensure that Centre's have a copy of the current relevant Standards

Eggshell - crushed eggshell can cause injury to the eyes. Be aware of allergies. The use of egg cartons may carry the risk of salmonella.

Family Play - dolls bottles filled with toxic liquids. Pretty bracelets filled with liquid, glitter, beads. Plastic food to be washed after use.

Fire Hazards - your Fire Safety report should give an indication of these. Use flame retardant furnishings, or more fire resistant materials such as wool. Install the correct regulation alarms and follow any other Fire compliance directives.

Fireman's Pole - young children find these difficult to use as they lack the coordination needed to hold

tight and close to the pole. This causes swinging around pole, with their head leaning out to hit on the adjacent support structure. Inability to coordinate, hold and control descent speed leads to rapid heavy fall. This jars the developing growth plates in young bones. There is often insufficient resilience in the impact absorbing surface at the base of the pole. Refer to current NZ Playground Standards for more information

Fixed Structures - lack of versatility, need lots of ways on and off. Cost of construction is out of proportion to the play value. Moveable equipment lets children use their imagination and creativity; increase their grasp of math concepts. Prone to vandalism. Take care in commercially produced fixed structures that the equipment is developmentally appropriate for young children. Provide several angles of access (i.e. not all vertical climbers). Refer to current NZ Playground Standards for more information.

Flying Foxes - includes track type. These require careful, constant supervision. Motion, not height is the activity. What is learnt from this item? The child has no control once in motion. Requires large area of impact absorbing surface below. Considered inappropriate for early childhood and its play value, more suited to public playgrounds. Use a sit-in harness, not a rope knot to sit on; never use a wooden seat as if this hits someone passing by, it can cause severe head injuries. Refer to current NZ Playground Standards for more information.

Geo Gyms - these can be hazardous if not secured properly to the ground. Dependant on the make, model and size, Geo Gyms can be used inappropriately and may not foster social play and cannot be utilised by all age groups. Geo Gyms that are made out of metal and are coated could potentially rust and pieces may break off. There are other ways of providing the same climbing development without the amount of room that this piece of equipment requires

Glass - windows at low levels and sliding doors need to be laminated safety glass. Fish tanks and insect containers should be made of laminated safety glass, or covered with a safety film. Use perspex insect boxes as an alternative. Fish tanks should be anchored to wall or table to prevent tipping over, especially in the event of an earthquake. Bottles and jars stored safely or replaced with plastic ones. Do not have glass lampshades as in the event of an earthquake these will probably shatter. Mirrors must be made out of safety glass, covered by adhesive film or guarded by barriers.

Glitter - hazardous to small children and requires supervision whenever used. Can be abrasive to eyes, tongues, mouths, throats and lungs. Be aware of any child that eats playdough if glitter included.

Hot Drinks - keep out of children's reach to avoid burns. Consider a policy that forbids hot drinks in the play space and/or restricts them to the kitchen area. **WARNING** – Arcoroc Mugs have tendencies to explode and shatter.

Highchairs - must have a 5 point harness and be able to completely cleaned down and sanitised.

Hygiene - poor hygiene in a Centre is a health hazard (as we all know) but do not forget daily wiping over/cleaning dirty upholstery, baby toys, hand basin, water taps, and door knobs. Dishwashers are excellent for washing cups, plates etc. Can also be used for play equipment e.g. playdough items, but these should be washed separately to eating/food utensils. Remember that dishwasher powder is toxic and burns the mouth area if ingested - watch out for powder residue on inside of dishwasher door.

Insecure Fencing & Gates - No one likes to hear of stories about children who went home to Mum by themselves when they are supposed to be at Playcentre

and no one noticed them leave. Fencing should comply with current regulations.

Incinerators - these should be fenced off if you have one on the property, otherwise children may tamper with the ash (hot or not) or uncover dangerous items. Rubbish should not be burnt during a session.

Indoor Equipment - think about challenges that don't involve height (more than 600mm height); otherwise you will need to use impact absorbing surface around equipment (the same as outdoors). Gym mats are just that; for tumbling and rolling on, not falling onto.

Iron Filings - 1/3 teaspoon is a toxic dose for children. Consider using only if packed in a pre-sealed container. Consider using only if it comes with a science kit, or in a permanently sealed container

Jewellery - unsuitable jewellery with sharp points - not just on the fastener. Discard cheap beads that will not stay strung together.

Junk - remove & dispose of old disused, broken equipment & furniture lying around 'just in case' it may be used. Scrap used timber with nails, collage materials, painted etc. No one likes to use someone else's creation.

Kitchen - have restricted, limited access to kitchen. There should be a latchable door/partition to prevent a child wandering into the kitchen area unsupervised. Kitchens need to be completely inaccessible to children. Store sharp knives out of a child's reach. Use a stove guard to prevent spills. Use a kettle/jug holder to prevent this being pulled over. Buy a cordless jug; consider an automatic jug that turns itself off, or a wall heating system. Put safety latches onto cupboard doors. Secure crockery cupboard door.

Consider unbreakable coffee mugs; remember that Arcoroc type glass shatter into tiny pieces.

Marbles - not suitable for young children. Can roll away and be found by a smaller child. Maintain close supervision when these are being used. Account for each marble when taking out and putting away into safe storage.

Mechanical Pencil Sharpeners - keep out of children's reach; fingers are the same size as pencils! Use an ordinary pencil sharpener but check often that the blade is secure.

Money (Play) - be aware of size, could be a potential choking hazard.

Office Equipment - typewriters, cash registers, and computers if they do not work properly, can teach children bad skills - not how to use them, but to abuse them in frustration. These bad habits then continue as they meet 'the real' thing at home or school.

Open Drains - these collect water that can lead to drowning. Collection pools of water are unhygienic; a child should not play in this water. Be aware of drain covers that can trap little fingers or feet, and can be a trip hazard.

Photocopiers - working ones. Must be inaccessible to children when in use and kept out of reach when not in use e.g. cover, barrier or separate room.

Pins & Needles - store sewing items safely. Use under supervision.

Plastic Bags - suffocation danger and should be stored knotted and away.

Plastic Moulded Outdoor Play Equipment - e.g. Little Tykes, Flexible Flyer. Poorly designed, too

small. For domestic use rather than Centre use. Requires impact absorbing surfacing if over 600mm. Make sure the equipment is suitable for the purpose.

Play pens - better to let the little ones explore the stimulating environment of Playcentre!

Poisonous Plants - refer to a good New Zealand guide to poisonous plants. There may be other plants you wish to get rid of for allergy reasons as they give a burning sensation in the mouth, but are not highly toxic.

Power Leads - do not have these where children can reach them, particularly around water or scissors. Recommend the use of a RCD - Residual Current Device (Check local regulations).

Power points - at low levels should have a child proof/shock stop cover. Having points at adult height is even better.

Pull-along Toys - with fine or long cords which may not be seen by other children before tripping over them. Cords can become tangled around body. Be aware of the bead on end; too small and it could become a choking hazard.

Rope - some kinds of rope burn hands (friction burns). Substitute a flat braided nylon rope for play activities. Refer to current NZ Playground Standards for more information.

See-Saws - children misjudge the space underneath. Jars the back, squashed fingers, feet, legs under them. Crack chins on the handles. Unevenly weighted children result in one child being stuck high in the air.

Self-locking Cupboards - children may get into but not out of.

Shelving - overweighed shelving can collapse or

topple over (bookshelves common). Have well-constructed shelving that is securely fastened to the wall.

Slides - check that the slide you purchase has a flat take-off platform with guiding handrails at the top and a flat run-off at the bottom; ensure that the current NZ Playground Safety Standards are met.

Small Objects - any small object that fits into a 35mm canister can be a choking hazard. Be aware of where little people are, where small objects are, and don't forget the floor! Watch out for the hygiene of objects that are explored by mouth. Watch for small puzzle pieces and manipulative items.

Straws - always use purchased drinking straws for activities, not used straws from drinks. This is for hygiene purposes. Sharing of straws is not advisable also because of hygiene. Always discard after use.

Unwashed Containers - check any containers in the Centre for children's play are clean of their original contents.

Vehicles - cars, boats, tractors etc need to be well maintained and sited over impact absorbing surfacing if height over 600mm. Inspect regularly for rusting and deterioration. Remove and dispose of them when they get too old. Teaches children that playing in vehicles is ok and fun - IS IT? Prone to vandalism.

Water - any water that 'pools' in depressions; children drown in surprisingly small amounts. Containers of deep water, even buckets, a child can fall headfirst into and not be able to right themselves.

Wendy House - needs to be cleaned after each session for hygiene. Prone to vandalism. Supervision may be difficult. Play can become possessive and exclusive.

Wet Floors - slips cause injuries. Have areas where

wet weather gear can be removed safely. Have non-slip strips to smooth floors, outside ramps.

Wide Slides - very young children are heaviest in the heads and this causes them to drift across the slide until they are sliding down sideways, or head first. A wide slide encourages more than one child at a time, which leads to injuries if they land on top of each other at the bottom. Many children find the extra width frightening and daunting to venture onto.

Zoom Slides - require supervision at all times. Exit from platform requires gate across when the slide is not in place. Guy wire posts are a trip hazard, especially when slide not in place. Slippery when wet. Can be installed from a 1.5m platform. Take care that slide does not touch the ground when child descends. Ensure that the child cannot go underneath the slide when it is in use. Recommend opening 60cm wide to allow only one child to exit at a time.