

# Keeping play safe



Early learning centres have so many tasks and requirements to juggle. The children need to be educated while enjoying themselves and, importantly, staying safe. Centres need to provide all of this while meeting their many regulatory requirements. The desire to create a fun, learning environment with lots of variety encourages educators to become creative with the activities they provide. However, unfortunately these activities don't come without risk. And occasionally the more creative they become, the riskier they can become.

## What can go wrong?

It should be no surprise to any early learning educator that Guild Insurance sees many cases of children being injured while in an early learning centre. It's easy to think that kids will be kids and they'll always do something, like trip over their own feet, to find a way of injuring themselves. While this may be true to some extent, sadly many of the injuries are severe and long-term, yet also preventable.

A concerning occurrence seen in early learning centres is play and other activities that are potentially dangerous and unsafe. This often occurs when toys, or other equipment, are being used in a way they aren't designed for or that's suitable for that child.

It also occurs when an adequate risk assessment hasn't been carried out.

## For example...

- > Some children were kicking a ball around a yard; it was quite a hard ball and fully inflated. Other children were playing nearby and not paying attention to what was happening with the ball when it hit one of them in the face causing two teeth to break.
- > A wooden beam was used to connect two pieces of climbing equipment, yet it wasn't designed to be used in this way. While a child was walking across the beam it fell, causing the child to fall to the ground and sustain a fractured arm.
- > While swinging a wooden bat to hit a ball, a child accidentally let go of the bat. It hit another child on the head causing concussion.

## Tips for safer play

- > When creating new games for children, be sure to find the balance between creativity and safety. Sometimes people focus too much on creating something new and exciting that the children haven't done before yet forget to think about the risks that could come with the new activity.

- > Always assess the risk of any new toy, equipment, or activity. And remember that risk assessments don't have to be huge and cumbersome, they can be as simple as stopping and thinking about what could go wrong before it does. But when thinking about what could go wrong, think outside the square. Children often find unique ways of injuring themselves and others.
- > Use equipment for the purpose it's been designed and adhere to the manufacturer's safety and maintenance recommendations.
- > When selecting equipment or a toy for an activity, consider if there's an alternate option which might be safer for children, such as something which is smaller, softer or lighter.
- > Consider where children are playing and what other games are happening around them. If children are playing different games near each other, there's always a risk of injury if they aren't aware of all that's happening around them. It's quite easy for children to run into each other or be hit by equipment when they're solely focused on what they're doing.

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