

CHILD WELFARE

Specialty Insurance Program



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Children's Safety: Playgrounds

Teach them how to play safely

One of the best things about nice weather is that children can head to the playground. But whether it's a public playground or a home jungle gym, it is necessary to take certain safety precautions.

Surface Safety

One of the most important features of a play area is something children likely take for granted – the playing surface. What the ground is covered in is just as important as the equipment – it should be soft enough to cushion a child's fall. But keep in mind that even the safest surfacing cannot prevent all injuries.

- Concrete, asphalt and blacktop are all unsafe.
- If a child is in a wheelchair, rubber mats will allow the easiest access.
- The playground surface should be free of debris that could cause kids to trip and fall, such as rocks, tree stumps and tree roots.

Other Things to Look For

Playgrounds are ultimately safest when equipment is separated into three distinct groups: for children under age 2, for 2- to 5-year-olds, and for 5- to 12-year-olds. It is important for children to play on age-appropriate gear so that they do not injure themselves on improperly sized equipment. In addition:

- Items with moving parts (such as seesaws and swings) should be located in a separate area.
- Look for any spaces that could trap a child's head, arms or legs. All openings (such as the rungs on a ladder) should be either less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- Wooden equipment should not be cracked or splintered.
- Metal equipment should not be rusting.
- If the playground has a sandbox, make sure it's inspected before use. It should be covered every night to prevent animal contamination.



Supervise, Supervise, Supervise!

Of course it's impossible to prevent every injury, but playgrounds are a lot safer when adults are around to watch. Younger children will not always have the best judgment and many older kids like to push the boundaries of safety. Also, in the worst case scenario, adults can offer assistance with an injury.

Did you know...?

The following types of equipment are unsafe on playgrounds: animal figure swings, glider swings that hold more than one child, swinging ropes (they can fray, unravel or form a noose), exercise rings (as used in gymnastics) and trapeze bars.





Risk Insights

The Importance of Background Checks

Employing trustworthy, quality educators is one of the most important responsibilities of an administrator, and background checks are a fundamental part of ensuring this trustworthiness. Considering that the well-being of students is on the line, thorough background checks should unquestionably be a deciding factor in the hiring process. They are a cornerstone of any good risk management program.

While regulations vary from state to state, there are certain federal resources, including the Adam Walsh Act, the National Sex Offender Registry and the Uniform Conviction Information Act (UCIA) that can help educational facilities ensure the integrity of their teachers. Using these and other resources, you will ensure that the educators you hire live up to your community's standards.

Federal Resources

Whether or not your state law requires it, these federal resources should be an integral part of your background screening process:

- The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 allows various educational and child welfare entities access to the FBI repository of criminal history information. The ISP Bureau of Identification (www.isbe.state.il.us/pdf/Adam_Walsh.pdf) has more information.
- The National Sex Offender Registry, also known as the Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public Registry, is maintained by the U.S. Department of Justice and is a cooperative agreement between states that maintain sex offender registries and the federal government. Access the registry at www.nsopr.gov

Advantages of Pre-screening

Job applicants with a criminal record may not disclose this information. Therefore, consider these advantages of pre-screening potential employees using a simple fingerprint-based check through the police and FBI:

- Discourages applicants from hiding a criminal background or falsifying their credentials.
- Eliminates any uncertainties about applicants in the hiring process.
- Demonstrates due diligence to hire applicants that do not pose a liability.
- Encourages honesty while going through the hiring process.

Taking Further Steps

Beyond screening an applicant using federal resources and doing a basic criminal record check, take a risk-focused approach to determining which additional levels of screening to implement. Use the type and sensitivity of the open position to gauge the appropriate amount of screening. Further verification might include:

- Identity verification
- Social security number verification
- Employment verification
- Education verification
- Professional license verification
- Motor vehicle reports
- Drug testing

Many job applicants have a criminal record that would compromise their job placement, yet they do not disclose this information.

Obligations and Outside Providers

To simplify the task, you may find it helpful to outsource the process to a background screening service provider. For many screening tasks, such as criminal background checks, outside providers can be faster and more thorough. It is important that when selecting such a provider that you consider its financial statements and health, its hiring and employment processes, identity theft safeguards and, of course, service offerings.

You have several obligations to the applicant under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).

- Any applicant on whom an institution performs a background screen must give his or her written authorization to conduct the report.
- If you ultimately deny employment, you must provide notification through pre-adverse action and final adverse action notification letters.

The stakes when hiring educators are high. The community relies on you to take the appropriate measures to ensure students' safety.

