



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Systemwide Safety Programs
Division of Facilities Management

Playground and Recess Safety and Supervision Procedures

This guide has been developed to assist schools in establishing sound practices for the supervision of children during recess. Effective supervision is necessary for ensuring the recess play period is a productive and safe experience for students. Playground aides, teachers, and school administrators are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the rules and procedures provided in this guide. Additional playground and recess safety information is available at the [MCPS Systemwide Safety Programs website](#) and in the online training course, *Playground Supervision*, which can be accessed in [SafeSchools](#).

A. Division of Playground

The playground may be divided into areas of activity, with aides and teachers making certain every student knows which activities are permitted in each area.

B. Acceptable Outdoor Activities

1. Rings, tetherball, volleyball, basketball, hopscotch, and jump rope are acceptable activities on the blacktop area. Haphazard running, chasing, and tag games on the blacktop are *not* permitted.
2. Grassed area is to be used for activities determined by the principal or designee to be safe and appropriate for each grade level. The physical education teacher may provide suggestions for activities to be used during recess.
3. Baseball and football games are not permitted during recess.
4. It is the responsibility of teachers to instruct their students concerning standards for safety and behavior, as well as which activities are permitted on the playground and the designated areas for these activities.
5. It is the responsibility of the aide to see that common sense standards of safety and behavior are being observed, to correct students in a proper manner when deviations from these standards occur, and to maintain all playground rules.
6. Students are not permitted to: play with neighborhood pets; throw or kick dirt, stones, sticks, and debris on the playground or into neighbors' yards; disturb people or pets in neighboring yards; use playground or recess equipment improperly; wrestle on the ground; climb fences or trees; hit one another even playfully; or tease other students.

C. Acceptable Indoor Activities

1. When extreme weather or outdoor temperatures dictate that students should remain indoors during their recess play period, it is the responsibility of teachers to instruct their classes as to which activities are permitted within the room and to make available for use those games, puzzles, and other equipment that can be used.
2. Guidance for restricting or canceling outdoor recess based on temperature can be found at: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/facilities/safety/playground/#recess-temp>
3. Consult the MCPS Emergency Resources web page for appropriate indoor activities pertaining to art, music, and physical education: <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/emergency/resources/>.

D. Policy Concerning Children Who Stay Indoors During Outdoor Play Period

If for reasons of health, discipline, or completing assigned schoolwork, a student remains in the classroom during the outdoor play period, the student is the responsibility of the teacher for that classroom.

E. Specification of "Off-limit" Areas

Teachers should provide students the opportunity to use restrooms and drinking fountains before they go to the playground. Students should not enter the building during play period without the knowledge and consent of the person on duty.

1. Students are not to play near windows of classrooms.
2. Students are not to leave school property.

F. Rules for Safe Use of Playground Equipment

1. Do not use playground equipment when icy or wet.
2. Students may not wear scarves, loose clothing, mittens/gloves attached with strings, clothing with drawstrings, or any other apparel that can cause entanglement and strangulation.
3. Any toys with strings, ropes, or cords are prohibited near playground equipment because they can cause entanglement and strangulation.
4. Students should form a single file line, awaiting turns to use equipment.
5. Opposed thumb grip should be used on all climbing and swinging structures.
6. Students may not sit on rings but rather swing from one to the other until they have reached the end.
7. A student may not begin to swing on rings and bars until the student ahead of him/her has finished.
8. Students may not sit or stand on top of equipment that is not designed for that purpose (such as climbers, rock walls, etc.).

G. Responsibilities of Playground Aides and Use of Discipline

1. Since the primary responsibility of the aide is the supervision of all students on the playground, the aide shall not participate in or umpire any games or activities.
2. If playground rules are being broken, aides are expected to speak to the student in question in a constructive manner and tone.
3. If students consistently violate the rules of the playground despite reminders (insubordination), refer them to the teacher and school administration.
4. If the student's first offense is serious (such as breaking a window, fighting, using profane language), refer the student to the teacher and school administration. School administration and/or teacher will determine discipline.
5. Never tell a student to sit in the classroom the remainder of the period.

H. Injuries, Illnesses, and Emergencies

1. In case of injury to one's pride, be sympathetic and understanding.
2. In case of a minor injury (e.g., splinter, cut, skinned limbs, minor bump on head), send the student to the health office immediately in the company of a fellow student who is considered responsible. Each school should develop its own emergency procedures.
3. In case of serious injury, notify the health office and school administration immediately by an expedient method at your disposal (interrupt a teacher's class if needed so the teacher can help). Beware of moving the child. Keep area clear of other students. The welfare of this child becomes your sole responsibility.

4. If a child becomes ill, he/she should be sent to the health office in the company of a responsible student.
5. First aid, whenever feasible, should be administered primarily by health room staff.
6. An aide should not leave the playground area while on duty, unless the safety or welfare of a student is dependent upon such action.
7. Schools should develop and practice emergency procedures for incidents that occur while students and staff are located at playgrounds and fields.

I. Procedure for Termination of Play Period

1. When the bell rings, students should line up in designated areas.
2. When a line is orderly, students may be permitted to enter the building.
3. Students are to go in the building quietly at all times in an orderly manner in single file.

J. Making Existing Playgrounds Safer

1. All teachers and playground aides who supervise playgrounds should:
 - Complete the online safety course, *Playground Supervision*, which can be accessed in [SafeSchools](#).
 - Have a thorough knowledge of all playground and recess rules.
 - Know what games may be played in each area.
 - Know the school's accident reporting procedures.
 - Know the school's discipline procedures.
 - Have a basic understanding of first aid procedures.
 - Be consistent in dealing with problems that arise. Address problems constructively.
 - Understand how to effectively monitor playgrounds: moving from area to area to observe the full playground, not getting distracted, not getting involved in students' games/activities, looking for potentially hazardous situations, anticipating problems and intervening proactively, etc.
 - Be alert to potential problem situations, such as the following:
 - Organized team games that result in arguments on rule interpretation
 - Individual games, like 3 square and tetherball, which require taking turns
 - Discourage hazardous situations, such as the following:
 - Tag on the blacktop or confined areas where large numbers of students may be located.
 - Team games such as basketball taking place in the center of individual play areas.
 - Students running through other games.
 - Chase games on or near climbing equipment.
 - Inadequate field conditions for the activity.
 - A student trying a task that is too difficult for his/her age or size.
 - Overcrowding of certain areas/equipment.
 - Games with materials (balls, ropes, hoops, etc.) near climbing equipment. Any toys with strings, ropes, or cords are prohibited near playground equipment because they can cause entanglement and strangulation.
 - Students wearing scarves, loose clothing, mittens/gloves attached with strings, clothing with drawstrings, or any other apparel that can cause entanglement and strangulation on playground equipment.
 - Check the playground for hazardous conditions, such as the following:
 - Damaged equipment.
 - Evidence of vandalism.
 - Poor condition of surfacing under equipment, such as weeds growing in the playground mulch or insufficient playground mulch.

- Debris, trash, or other foreign objects.
 - Ropes, strings, pet leashes, cables, or cords attached to, or near, playground equipment.
 - Dead or damaged trees or tree branches.
 - Holes in the ground or playground surfacing.
 - Hot playground equipment surfaces. Direct sun exposure can heat surfaces even when outdoor air temperatures are not elevated.
2. Foreign objects that can cause injury, such as metal cans, broken glass, and stones, should be removed to trash cans by the teacher or aide on duty. If the quantity of such objects is large or they present significant hazards, teachers or aides should notify a building service worker and keep students away from the area until it is safe for play. Do not permit students to handle hazardous objects. Any item on or near the playground which can cause injury—such as a hole in the ground, bees' nest in a tree, and dead or broken branches—must be reported to school administration. Such areas are off limits until they are made safe.
 3. Never send a student to the classroom for the remainder of the period.
 4. Never leave the playground area unless the safety or welfare of a student is dependent upon such action.
 5. The physical education teacher should:
 - Provide suggestions for activities to be used during recess and how to best use field space.
 - Recommend appropriate equipment and supplies for the recess period.
 6. The principal should:
 - Assign an appropriate number of aides or teachers to playground duty as facilities and numbers dictate. Supervision should be continuous. One adult should be dismissing one group while the second adult should be supervising those just arriving.
 - Schedule the recess so similar grade levels stay together (i.e., pre-K–K, K–1, 2–3, 4–5, etc.).
 - Define boundaries for ease of supervision while maximizing play area.
 - Ensure that a discipline policy and consequences are established and that students and teachers are informed.
 - Establish and enforce the discipline procedures to be followed.
 - Ensure daily inspection of all equipment and field space by building service staff, teachers, and/or playground aides. The [*Daily Play Equipment Inspection Form*](#) should be completed prior to playground equipment use each day.
 - Require the grounds to be checked daily for trash, broken glass, and other hazardous debris (including gravel on blacktop).

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