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## Child-proof playgrounds are worse than no fun

Adults nostalgic for the monkey bars and tall slides of their childhood may have trouble finding them when they take their own children to a nearby playground. Shorter structures with enclosed platforms, as well as rubber ground covers, are more likely what they'll see. This is because, as John Tierney [reports](#) in *The New York Times*, heightened concerns over child safety have dramatically changed the landscape of the playground. Such concerns, coupled with an increasingly prevalent fear of litigation, have led to stricter manufacturer safety standards and federal guidelines. In New York City, for instance, officials removed seesaws, merry-go-rounds, tire swings, and ropes from all public playgrounds.

And this is too bad, say experts in child development. "Children need to encounter risks and overcome fears on the playground," says Ellen Sandseter, a professor of psychology at Queen Maud University in Norway. Dr. Sandseter and psychologist Leif Kennair at the Norwegian University for Science and Technology explain how important it is for children to encounter thrills and risks through play, which allows them to gradually learn how to navigate such situations and emotions. "Risky play mirrors effective cognitive behavioral therapy in anxiety," Sandseter and Kennair write in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology*, emphasizing that this kind of play in childhood actually makes it far less likely that a person will develop anxieties later in life.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross agrees that these effectively "child-proof" playgrounds are becoming the norm. "It's a shame," he says, "that fear of being sued dominates decisions about appropriate playtime activities for kids today. The loss to children is immeasurable, and the overarching desire for absolute safety is seen in the current crusade by activist groups and tort lawyers against any risk from any behavior or substance."

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom has a similar take. "This concept of 100% safety for anything involving children is absurd," he says. "For generations, kids have done just fine without safe playgrounds, constant parental contact via cell phones, 'chemical-free' shampoos, and organic food. You got banged around or scraped your knee, and you lived. What's next? Kevlar vests and night vision glasses for walking to school?"

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