

# FOUR STEPS TO PLAYGROUND PLANNING



NATIONAL PLAYGROUND  
COMPLIANCE GROUP



*“Play  
is the  
work of  
children.  
It’s very  
serious  
stuff.”*

Bob Keeshan  
(aka Captain  
Kangaroo)



Welcome to the team!

If you’re reading this, you’re likely to be considering new playground equipment or improvements for your school or community. On behalf of your children, thank you for taking on this responsibility.

Playgrounds are community centers for our children. Playgrounds are where they learn new skills, develop physically and emotionally, and discover more about the world around them.

Without proper planning, maintenance and ongoing supervision, playgrounds can be a hazardous place.

At National Playground Compliance Group (NPCG), we understand those hazards and pledge to be at your side throughout the process, helping you understand the critical steps to creating a safe and engaging playground for your children.

From our complimentary playground inspections and staff training to delivery and installation of safety-tested and ADA-compliant surfacing and structures, NPCG shares your desire to provide a safe, challenging and age-appropriate experience for children of all abilities.

Sincerely,

National Playground Compliance Group

Playground owners – school districts and state and local parks departments, for example – are legally responsible to ensure that their playground is compliant with state and federal safety and accessibility guidelines. From safety surfacing that reduces serious injuries and allows access for children of all abilities to safe, age-appropriate play structures, you have options that will make your playground safer and more enjoyable for every child. Consider the following issues as you begin planning your playground.

## 1. UNDERSTAND YOUR NEEDS

The first steps in planning a new playground are to assess the safety of existing structures, if any, and determine the needs to be addressed with a new playground. A Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) will help you walk through key questions, including:

1. When was your current playground built? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Will any or all of your current structures be integrated with the new equipment?  
 yes     no     unsure
3. Are there any head entrapments, entanglement dangers or other “priority one” hazards in your playground?  
 yes     no     unsure
4. Are the play structures appropriate for the ages of the children who use them?  
 yes     no     unsure
5. What is the critical fall height of your play structures? \_\_\_\_\_  unsure
6. What type of surfacing material is currently being used?  
 grass     pea gravel     mulch     ground rubber  
 poured-in-place rubber     rubber safety tiles
7. Is the playground ADA-compliant with accessible surfacing that provides access to and through the playground as well as equipment that offers a variety of accessible play events?  
 yes     no     unsure
8. Do you have playground safety inspections on file?  
 yes     no     unsure

**More than 200,000 children are treated for playground injuries in U.S. hospital emergency rooms each year.**



## 2. MAKE THE SAFE SURFACE CHOICE

While concrete, hard-packed dirt and grass were common playground surfaces decades ago, today's playground owners have a number of better choices, including loose-fill materials and rubber tiles. Organic and inorganic loose-fill materials such as wood chips, shredded bark mulch, engineered wood fibers, sand, gravel and shredded tires are low-cost solutions. Poured-in-place rubber surface and rubber tiles, however, provide a more level, safe surface with lower long-term maintenance costs. Rubber tiles are engineered to meet Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) impact guidelines, provide adequate drainage and are easy to maintain, meaning more play days with less work at a lower cost than other forms of surfacing.

The playground surface is your biggest safety investment, so consider these questions as you evaluate your alternatives.

1. Are you aware that ADA legislation requires all Title II public facilities to provide accessibility with any new construction or alteration?  
 yes     no     unsure
2. Will your new or upgraded playground use safety surfacing that is non-allergenic and will not harbor animal feces, mold or bacteria that has been shown to exacerbate asthma and allergies in children?  
 yes     no     unsure
3. Will low-maintenance, ADA accessible safety surfacing be a consideration in your new or remodeled playground?  
 yes     no     unsure
4. If you choose loose-fill material, do you have adequate resources to provide uniform depth for fall protection? Keep it level? And free of standing water and debris?  
 yes     no     unsure
5. If you choose permanent safety surfacing, what portion of your budget do you expect to invest?  
 10%     25%     50%
6. How much of your budget do you expect to apply to annual replenishment costs for loose-fill material or repair costs for rolled or cracked poured-in-place surfaces?  
 1%     2%     3%     4%     4%+
7. What is the life expectancy of your surfaces?  
 1 year     2 years     5 years     10 years     15 years     16+ years
8. Do you have options for high-traffic areas?  
 yes     no     unsure

**Poor maintenance contributes to more than 40% of all serious playground injuries.**





### 3. CHOOSE THE RIGHT PLAY STRUCTURES FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

While it's tempting to pick a play structure from a catalog of playground equipment, choosing the right play events without a strategy and a knowledgeable approach can be an overwhelming and disappointing assignment. Establishing selection criteria based on research will help you narrow your choices from myriad look-alike products available from a variety of playground distributors and dealers willing to take your order. As you approach the task of purchasing a new playground, consider the following issues:

1. Will the new equipment be ASTM-compliant, and more important, will it pass a CPSI inspection once it is installed?  
 yes     no     unsure
2. Is safety your absolute top priority?  
 yes     no     unsure
3. Do you understand the social, intellectual, physical and emotional learning needs of children of different ages and the play events that address them?  
 yes     no     unsure
4. What is the maximum number of children who will be using the playground at one time?  
 \_\_\_\_ Toddlers (age 6 to 24 months)  
 \_\_\_\_ Pre-schoolers (age 2 to 5 years)  
 \_\_\_\_ School-age children (age 5 to 12 years)
5. Do you have space to create separate play areas for toddlers, pre-schoolers and school-age children, and age-appropriate play events?  
 yes     no     unsure
6. Do you understand the physical limitations of children of different ages and the appropriate equipment – and maximum fall heights – for each?  
 yes     no     unsure
7. Do you want a mix of ground level and elevated play areas?  
 yes     no     unsure
8. Is development of upper- and lower-body strength important in the design of your playground?  
 yes     no     unsure
9. Will the playground be accessible to the public?  
 yes     no     unsure
10. Are you considering the site amenities that will make your playground a more attractive center of activity for the community?  
 yes     no     unsure

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 addresses requirements for newly constructed or altered playgrounds.

### 4. INSTALL, TRAIN AND INSPECT

Safety considerations don't end when you sign the purchase order. Qualified installers help ensure that the safety designed and built into the equipment and surfacing is there when the playground is installed...and years later. Supervisory training and ongoing inspections further protect the children on your playground. As you consider what will happen after your playground equipment arrives on-site, think about these questions:

1. Will you be relying on volunteers to install all of your playground equipment and surfacing?  
 yes     no     unsure
2. Do you have liability insurance in place to cover volunteer installers during the installation?  
 yes     no     unsure
3. Does your liability insurance cover installers two, five, 10 years down the road?  
 yes     no     unsure
4. If you're using professional installers, are they insured and/or bonded? Certified?  
 yes     no     unsure
5. How often are you able to have a knowledgeable person inspect and document deficiencies on your playground?  
 daily     weekly     monthly     annually

### SAFE PLAYGROUND CHECKLIST

As you plan your new playground, how important are each of the following factors on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all important and 5 being very important?

	not at all important				very important
Low up-front costs	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Low lifetime costs	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Low maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
ADA compliance of equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
ADA accessibility of surfacing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
CPSC compliance	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Cleanliness of surface	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Separation of age groups	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
High challenge/low risk	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Critical fall heights	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Vendor knowledge and assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Social learning areas	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Intellectual learning areas	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Physical learning areas	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Emotional learning areas	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Vendor installation services	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5





## WHAT'S NEXT?

1. Contact your NPCG program manager, who will work with you throughout the development of your safe, accessible and age-appropriate playground.
2. With the help of your NPCG program manager, determine your desired play events and types of learning.
3. Your NPCG program manager will design a safe, unique playground solution and present you and your team with complete 3-D renderings of your specific playground, including safe use zones, ASTM-compliant equipment and ADA-compliant safe surfacing. Make adjustments based on your budget and timeline, and approve final designs and production schedule.
4. Place your order. Your NPCG program manager will coordinate site preparation; schedule material delivery; and manage all aspects of installation of playground equipment, site amenities and safety surfacing.
5. Schedule your grand opening celebration. Your NPCG program manager can support your efforts with promotional materials, news release templates and ideas to make your grand opening special.
6. Work with your NPCG program manager to develop an ongoing inspection and maintenance program. Your program manager will provide sample inspection and maintenance forms, and train your staff to supervise, inspect and maintain your new playground.