

FREE PARENT'S GUIDE

A Safe Backyard Playset

What to consider before you buy—and how to help keep play safer for years to come.



A safer playset begins before installation.

The right equipment, a well-planned location, impact-absorbing surfacing, attentive supervision and routine maintenance all work together to reduce risk.

Prepared for families by Riehl Structures

West Chester & King of Prussia, Pennsylvania • riehlstructures.com

Start with the right plan

A backyard playset can become the center of childhood memories. It also deserves the same thoughtful planning you would give any permanent outdoor improvement. Use this guide when choosing a set, preparing the yard and caring for the equipment after installation.

Important

No play environment can be made injury-proof. This guide provides general educational information and does not replace the manufacturer's instructions, applicable codes, professional installation guidance or active adult supervision.

1 Choose age-appropriate equipment

Select a playset for the children who will use it now—not only for the features they may grow into later. Confirm the manufacturer's intended age range, user capacity and instructions for every component.

- ☐ Make sure ladders, climbing walls, openings and platform heights match the child's abilities.
- ☐ Use an appropriate toddler or belt swing for the child's age and development.
- ☐ Teach children to use one component at a time and only as intended.
- ☐ Do not allow use beyond the manufacturer's stated weight or occupancy limits.

2 Select a clear, visible location

Choose a level area where an adult can see the entire play zone. Avoid placing equipment close to traffic, driveways, pools, ponds, grills, fire pits, retaining walls, fences, sheds, trees, overhead wires or low branches.

- ☐ Confirm property lines, setbacks, easements, underground utilities and local permit requirements before installation.
- ☐ Allow the manufacturer's required use zone around the complete structure.
- ☐ Plan drainage so water does not collect beneath the playset or wash away loose-fill surfacing.
- ☐ Consider afternoon sun and the temperature of slides, handles and dark-colored surfaces.

Create a safer landing zone

3 Use impact-absorbing protective surfacing

Grass, packed soil, concrete and asphalt do not provide adequate impact protection. Use a playground surface appropriate for the equipment’s fall height, and follow the surfacing manufacturer’s installation and maintenance instructions.

Surface option	What parents should know
Engineered wood fiber / wood mulch	Can provide impact protection when installed and maintained at the required depth. It compresses and migrates, so it must be raked and replenished.
Shredded rubber / rubber mulch	Offers cushioning but requires containment, correct depth and periodic redistribution. Confirm the product is intended for playground use.
Unitary rubber tiles or poured surface	Can be accessible and lower-maintenance, but performance depends on professional specification, base preparation and installation.
Sand or pea gravel	May be appropriate in some applications but can displace, compact and require frequent upkeep. Confirm suitability for the equipment and use.

CPSC and the American Academy of Pediatrics advise using impact-absorbing surfacing and extending it at least 6 feet from equipment, with additional clearance for swings and certain slides. Always use the requirements supplied with your specific playset and surfacing system.

Swing clearance matters

For swings, the protective zone generally needs to extend farther in front of and behind the swing than it does around stationary components. CPSC guidance uses twice the height of the suspending bar as a general home-playground reference. Confirm the exact requirement for your set.

4 Insist on correct assembly and anchoring

- ☐ Follow the manufacturer’s instructions exactly; do not omit anchors, braces, hardware or protective caps.
- ☐ Confirm the structure is level, stable and properly anchored for the site conditions.
- ☐ Keep concrete footings below grade or otherwise protected so they do not create impact or tripping hazards.
- ☐ After installation, verify that bolts are tight, S-hooks are properly closed and no sharp edges or protruding fasteners remain.

Build safer play habits

5 Supervise with the child—not the phone—in view

Adult supervision is essential, especially for young children and whenever several children are playing together. Stay close enough to intervene before rough play, crowding or unsafe use becomes an injury.

- ☐ Set simple rules: no pushing, no climbing outside guardrails and no walking in front of moving swings.
- ☐ Use slides feet-first, one child at a time, and move away from the exit promptly.
- ☐ Do not allow children to twist swings, climb swing chains or swing empty seats toward others.
- ☐ Stop play during storms, high winds, icy conditions or whenever surfaces are wet or unusually hot.

6 Dress for active play

- ☐ Wear well-fitting, closed-toe shoes with secure soles.
- ☐ Remove bicycle helmets before using playground equipment; straps can catch on components.
- ☐ Avoid scarves, necklaces, drawstrings and loose clothing that could become entangled.
- ☐ Never attach jump ropes, clotheslines, pet leashes, hammocks or cords unless the component is specifically designed and approved for the playset.

7 Separate play by size and ability

A confident older child can unintentionally create danger for a toddler. If children of different ages are playing together, actively manage turns and guide younger children to components designed for them.

A helpful family rule

If a child cannot reach, climb or use a component without being lifted into position, the component may not yet be appropriate for independent play.

8 Keep the play area clear

- ☐ Remove toys, bikes, garden tools, hoses and other trip hazards from the use zone.

- ☐ Keep pets away from moving swings, slide exits and climbing areas.
- ☐ Do not store lawn equipment, chemicals or fuel beneath or beside the structure.

Maintain it like an outdoor structure

Weather, use and normal settling can loosen hardware, wear components and change the depth of protective surfacing. Follow the manufacturer's maintenance schedule and address concerns before children return to play.

Before each play session

- ☐ Scan for broken parts, sharp edges, insect nests, animal waste, standing water and debris.
- ☐ Check that slide surfaces, handholds and seats are not dangerously hot, wet or icy.
- ☐ Confirm the landing and swing areas are clear.

Monthly during the play season

- ☐ Tighten and inspect accessible hardware according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- ☐ Check swing seats, chains, ropes, connectors, gliders and moving parts for wear.
- ☐ Inspect wood for splinters, decay or cracking; inspect vinyl and plastic for damage or brittleness.
- ☐ Rake loose-fill surfacing back beneath swings, slide exits and other high-use areas; replenish it as needed.
- ☐ Look for movement at anchors, posts and footings and correct any instability.

At the start and end of the season

- ☐ Complete a thorough inspection using the manufacturer's checklist.
- ☐ Verify guardrails, barriers, roofs, ladders, steps and handholds remain secure.
- ☐ Check coatings and finishes; maintain wood or metal as the manufacturer directs.
- ☐ Confirm drainage and grading have not changed around the play area.
- ☐ Replace damaged components with manufacturer-approved parts—do not improvise repairs.

When in doubt, close the playset.

Prevent use until a loose, damaged or questionable component has been evaluated and repaired. Keep the manufacturer's manual, warranty information and installer contact details where you can find them.

Your safer-playset buying checklist

Bring this page to your consultation. A knowledgeable seller should be able to answer these questions clearly and help you understand what is included.

- ☐ Is the playset designed and labeled for home use, and does it meet the applicable ASTM F1148 home-playground standard?
- ☐ What ages, number of users and weight limits is the set designed to accommodate?
- ☐ What are the platform heights and recommended protective surfacing requirements?
- ☐ What exact use-zone dimensions and swing clearances are required?
- ☐ Will the proposed layout fit the yard while maintaining required setbacks and clearances?
- ☐ What site preparation, leveling, drainage or surfacing work is needed before installation?
- ☐ Are delivery, professional installation and anchoring included?
- ☐ Which features can be changed as children grow?
- ☐ What maintenance is required for wood, vinyl, metal hardware and moving components?
- ☐ What warranties apply to the structure, components and installation?
- ☐ Who should be contacted for replacement parts, service or relocation?
- ☐ Will local permits, HOA approval or utility marking be needed?

Notes for our yard

Children's ages: _____

Preferred playset location: _____

Available play area: _____

Surfacing plan: _____

Questions for our consultant: _____

Plan a backyard built for years of play

The best playset is not simply the one with the most features. It is the one that fits your children, your yard and the way your family will use it—supported by thoughtful placement, correct installation and ongoing care.

How Riehl Structures can help

Our local team can walk you through wood and vinyl playset options, age-appropriate features, site considerations and the installation process. You can compare displays in person and choose a playset that fits your family without a high-pressure sales experience.

Visit a showroom

West Chester, PA • King of Prussia, PA

Explore playsets and request a consultation

riehlstructures.com

Delivery and installation are available within Riehl Structures' service area. Product selection, site requirements and promotional terms may vary.

Trusted safety resources

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Outdoor Home Playground Safety Handbook: cpsc.gov/safety-education/safety-guides/playgrounds/outdoor-home-playground-safety-handbook

American Academy of Pediatrics, Safety Tips for Home Playground Equipment: healthychildren.org

Backyard Dreams Built to Last

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