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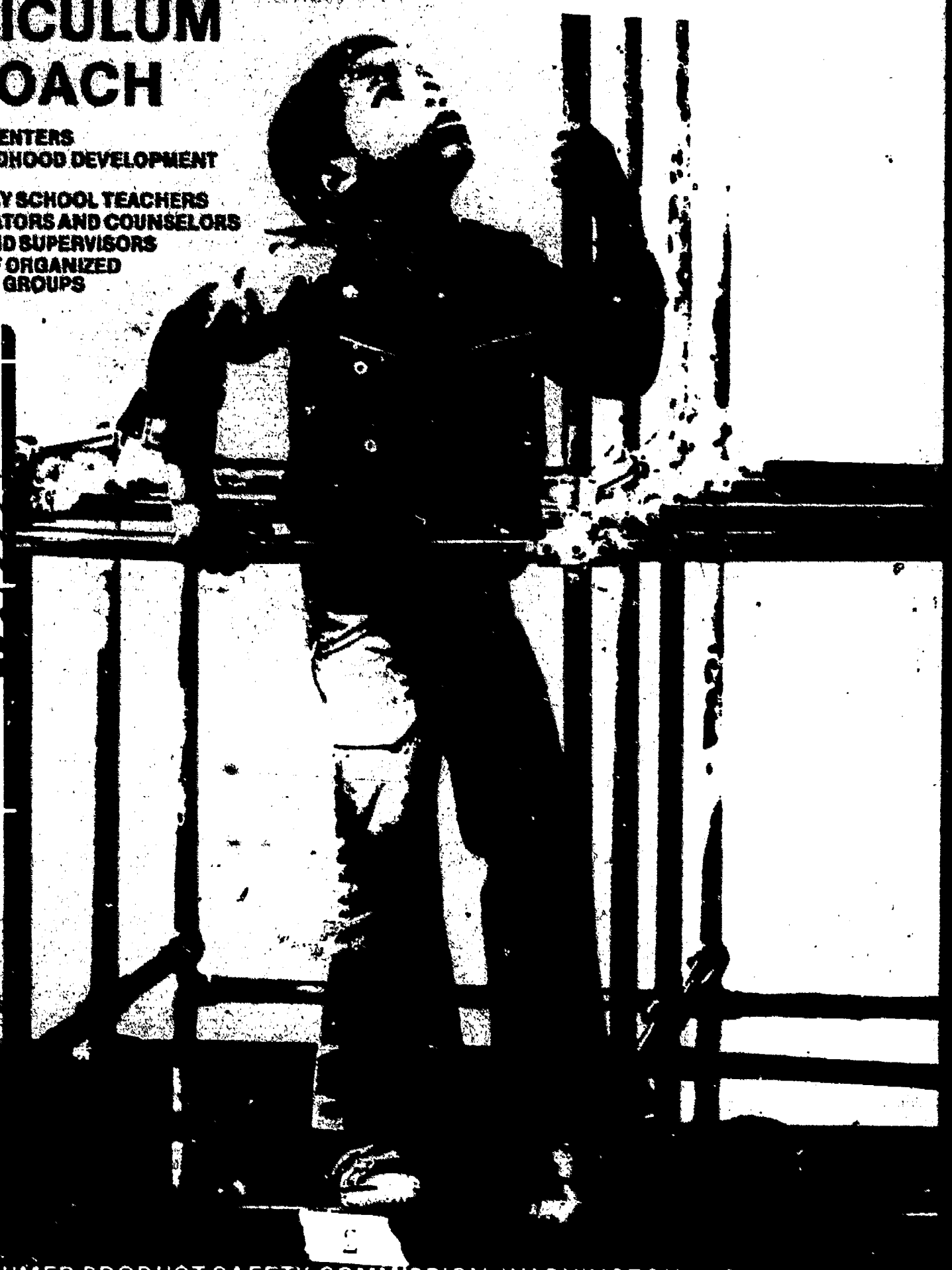
ABSTRACT

This learning approach emphasizes children's unique role in producing a safer playground environment. The emphasis is on awareness of safe play practices and an understanding of the safety hazards posed by poorly designed, poorly constructed, improperly maintained or misused equipment. The playground activities described are designed to help children bring their play to a safe conclusion by fostering individual attitudes of control and good judgment. (Author/MP)

"PLAY HAPPY, PLAY SAFELY"

A CHILD-CENTERED PLAYGROUND SAFETY CURRICULUM APPROACH

- DAY CARE CENTERS
- EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
- ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
- ADMINISTRATORS AND COUNSELORS
- PLAYGROUND SUPERVISORS
- LEADERS OF ORGANIZED CHILDREN'S GROUPS



U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207

INTRODUCTION

This learning approach emphasizes children's unique role in producing a safer playground environment. The emphasis is on an awareness of safe play practices and an understanding of the safety hazards posed by poorly designed, poorly constructed, improperly maintained, or misused equipment.

The outlined activities are designed to be used by any group, regardless of the environmental setting. The guiding principle behind these playground educational activities is that safety means caring about ourselves and others and protecting life from unnecessary risk or harm. The approaches to be conveyed to children are as follows:

—We, as adults, care about protecting children.

—We are going to assist them in activities that will increase their ability to play safely.

—We can teach them what safety means and share information that will help them play safely.

—We cannot play safely for them.

—We cannot coerce them into safe play habits.

—We can help them integrate their safety awareness into their general mental and physical growth activities.

—We can approach the subject of safety as one of great interest and concern to them personally.

Each adult leader or teacher should convey to the child that he does not intend to put arbitrary or meaningless limits on the child's exploration of his body's ability and sensations, but hopes to help the child discover the best ways to play happily and safely.

Our concern is not to curtail their activities in order to avoid experience along with accidents, but to help children bring their play to a safe conclusion, fostering individual attitudes of control and good judgment that can be transferred to other areas of learning.

Playground safety, used as a model of safety awareness, can have a lasting influence by increasing the child's consciousness of safety in other aspects of life.

Play and learning are not mutually exclusive; they are part of the child's work of discovering himself and his world. In exploring and exercising, the child discovers and integrates the external world with his inner life of thoughts and imagination.

In play, children acquire the means of understanding from first-hand experience, the concepts of causal relationships and the need to make judgments, to analyze, predict, and decide. Children enjoy and become absorbed in their play.

Children like to investigate their material world and love to feel that they can control or use things around them. As adults working with children, we can show them that only they can really "cause" safety to happen in their play activities.

It is recommended that children be encouraged to read the appropriate safety stories in the CPSC Playground Safety children's series: Little Big Kids, Medium Big Kids and Big Big Kids. All of the stories in this series can be used with a variety of the learning activities described on the following pages. Users also should order the Consumer Product Safety Commission publications booklet. This booklet lists all the Consumer Product Safety Commission publications, radio, film, slides, fact sheets and T.V. materials.

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Other educational materials in the series, all featuring Say-hey the frog, include:

Playground Equipment Handbook
(a resource/reference book for teachers and leaders)

Playground Equipment Guide
(a pamphlet for children to take home to adults)

Some Bear Facts About Playground Safety
(a poster)

Play Happy, Play Safely
(a slide series with cassette tape)

PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES
FOR LEVEL ONE (AGES 3-5) AND LEVEL TWO (AGES 6-9) CHILDREN

Most children, beginning at preschool age, have an idea of what safety is. Even the youngest child has probably been told not to cross the street without looking, not to play with electric wires; they are told it is not "safe" to do so (meaning they will get hurt if they do). We want to start at whatever level of conceptualization the child currently has about safety and help him or her expand and apply this understanding to playground equipment.

Playground accidents result from a variety of causes. Faulty, poorly designed, installed, or maintained equipment; misuse of equipment; and rough play, stunting, or other risk-taking activities by children are a few examples.

The vast majority of reported injuries involve children under ten years of age. Lacerations, contusions/abrasions, and fractures account for most injuries, the majority of which involve the head and extremities.

Climbing apparatus, slides, swing sets, and seesaws are most frequently involved in playground equipment-related accidents. The primary injuries occur when the child falls from the equipment. Other frequent injuries are being struck by moving equipment (i.e., running into the path of moving swings) or fingers and toes being trapped at a pivot or crush point.

The learning activities which present safety from the child's point of view will focus on accident causes according to three child involvement categories:

I
Playground hazards that cannot be controlled by the child

This includes the nine playground equipment safety points.

II
Misuse

This includes accidents the child can directly prevent by learning safe use of equipment.

A. Swings:
   1. Hold on with both hands.
   2. Stop the swing before getting off.
   3. Sit in the swing—do not stand up.
   4. Walk way around—not too close to the front or back of a moving swing.

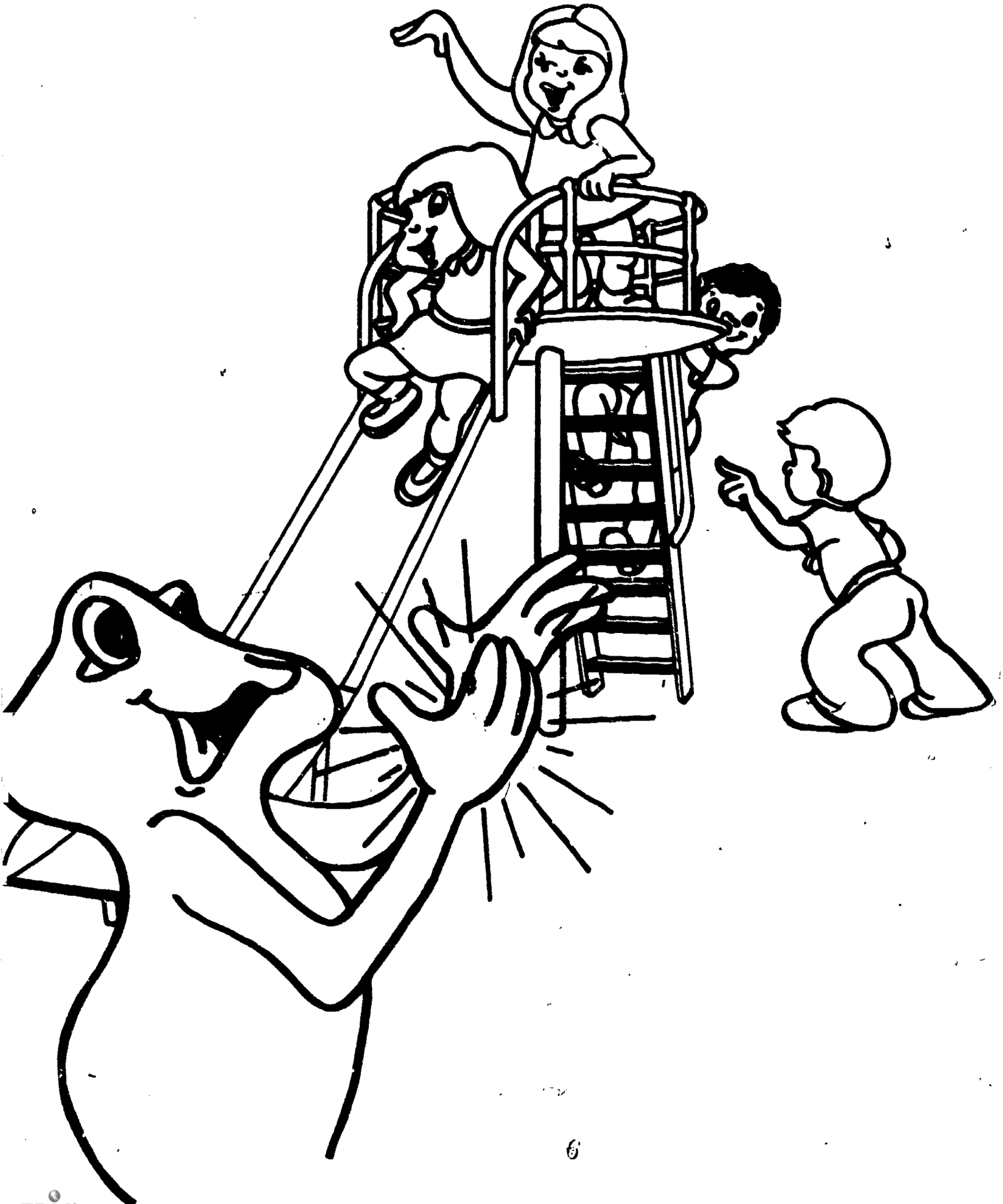
B. Seesaws:
   1. Both partners should have feet on the ground before one gets off.

C. Slides:
   1. Go up the steps of the slide, not up the sliding surface.
   2. Slide down feet first, always sitting up.
   3. Be sure no one is in front of the slide before sliding down.

D. General:
   1. Use fingers and thumbs for climbing and holding ("lock grip").

III
Social and emotional factors

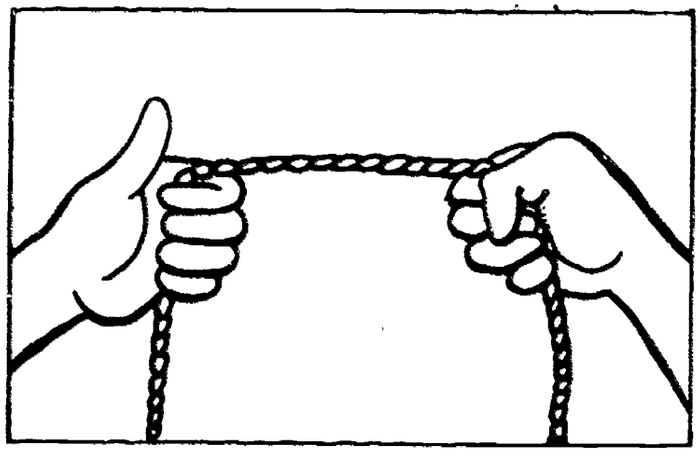
The child's behavior can be affected by understanding the dangers of rough play and risk taking.



CONCEPT	ACTIVITIES	RELATED LEARNINGS
Causes of playground accidents — preventive thinking	Present the children with a picture of an accident situation on the playground, e.g., a child on the ground in front of the swing sets. Ask them to form a mental chain, thinking backward from the situation they see to the events that might have led up to it. They may want to do this in the form of a story or brainstorm together and make a list on the blackboard. Ask them to consider and propose ideas for things the child might have done, how others might have helped him understand, or what they might have done that would have prevented the accident from happening.	Awareness of safety hazards and cause and effect relationships
Acting safely and carefully versus acting without concern for safety	Ask the children to think about how acting safely differs from acting carelessly. Give examples from their realm of experience, e.g., when riding in a car with your parents, what do you do to be safe before starting? When you ride your bike or skateboard on the playground, your body is your vehicle; what safety precautions do you take?	
Visualizing self in the playgound environment	Tell the children that from their play experiences they probably have a favorite piece of playground equipment or one they think they would most like to be. If they could become this piece of equipment, how would they take care of the children playing on it to make sure they would not get hurt? They can write and illustrate a story with themselves taking the role of the animated piece of equipment. An alternate approach is to suggest that if different pieces of playground equipment could talk, they would have lots of stories to tell, mostly happy ones, about the good times children have had using them. But they might have some sad stories too, ones about being neglected and falling into disrepair or about watching children misuse them and being hurt. Write and illustrate a story or act out a monologue from the point of view of a slide, swing, etc.	Identifying safety, art, creative imagination, writing, and illustrating

CONCEPT	ACTIVITIES	RELATED LEARNINGS
	An alternative project would be to have children make posters illustrating the nine playground safety danger points, focusing on those they actually encounter on the equipment they use at home, in school, or on the neighborhood playgrounds.	
Extent and seriousness of playground accidents within their own play areas	The students can conduct their own research into playground accidents by keeping a record of all accidents that occur and by making graphs and charts of the kinds of equipment involved and the accident patterns involved (e.g., falling, being struck by moving equipment). They can keep a weekly tally and try to promote the idea of a perfect record of no accidents. They can make up their own playground "Hazard Analysis" by discussing each accident as it occurs, why they think it happened, and what could be done to prevent other accidents of a similar pattern from occurring.	Research techniques, arithmetic, and analytical abilities
Becoming familiar with the playground equipment they actually use by reconstructing it; providing them with a concrete model to use while discussing safety and with models of themselves in relation to the equipment they use	Make a model of your own playground using cardboard boxes, milk cartons, pipe cleaners and other materials on hand; if three-dimensional materials are not available, make large drawings of the actual pieces of equipment the children use. The children may each make a pipe cleaner figure representing himself or herself to place on the model, or if drawings are used (a large bulletin-board-sized one would be good), allow each child to draw himself or herself somewhere on the playground.	
Creating their own safety-preventive concepts	Ask students to compose their own safety slogans and make them into posters for the classroom, school, or other public places. You can give them examples to help them get started, such as: Safety on the playground means _____ (e.g., control, caring about life, using your mind first, etc.). Every day I am becoming safer on the playground by _____. If you don't know if something is safe, ask.	Art, imagination, involvement in promoting a cause

CONCEPT	ACTIVITIES	RELATED LEARNINGS
Particular hazards associated with the actual equipment the children are using	Children (individually or in small groups) can be assigned to investigate a particular type of playground equipment for safety hazards. They can examine their own playground's equipment and report on the relative safety or hazardous conditions they find.	Research techniques and reporting
Specific equipment hazards; nine playground equipment danger points; safe play practices of the equipment most frequently used by the children. They need to become alert to potentially dangerous playground conditions and to develop the habit of asking adults' advice about safety and to understand the value of the lock-grip.	Take the children on a tour of a local playground or a school playground that they use, examining the equipment for the nine safety hazards. When possible, demonstrate for the children with props why a condition is a hazard to them, e.g., how hard and heavy seats are dangerous; how exposed nuts and bolts can scratch skin and catch clothing; how hands and feet can get caught in pinch and pivot points. Encourage them to ask if they do not know whether or not something is safe. Also review with them the proper use of the equipment, e.g., holding onto the swings with both hands. Have a practice session with the lock grip, with everybody practicing and feeling what a secure way it is of hanging onto playground equipment. A Tug of War activity illustrates the gripping power of the lock grip. One group holds the rope just with the four fingers of each hand (they do not use their thumbs). The other group holds the rope with their thumbs locked across their four fingers in what is known as the lock grip. (See illustration)	



CONCEPT	ACTIVITIES	RELATED LEARNINGS
	Materials needed: One ten-foot piece of rope or hose; gym mats, if activity is performed on a hard surface. 1. This activity should be performed on a grassy area in the playground or in a gymnasium with floor mats. 2. Demonstrate the lock grip for the students. 3. Work with small groups, perhaps six; divide into two equal teams. One team will hold the rope with the lock grip, the other will not. On the command of "Go," the Tug of War begins. The team not using the lock grip will lose. Now reverse the teams so that each group can experience the activity with and without the use of the lock grip. 4. End the activity with a group discussion of the importance and strength of the lock grip, and how this grip may be used in other activities, such as climbing on playground equipment.	
Cooperating in improving safety approaches on the playground	A group of students may want to make a project of marking with bright tape or other means the hazardous points, such as pivot or crush points, that they find on the equipment. They might also "retrofit" the set — tape over bolts, sand off the rust, and squeeze in the "S" hooks. A class project could be to do this for the school playground and to mark home equipment in a similar fashion. The children may be interested in other things they can do themselves, or in projects they could ask adults to help them with to guard themselves and other children from harm. Marking a wide area ("danger zone") on the ground around the swing sets so that children will immediately recognize how far away they should stay from moving swings is one example. Point out the surfacing of the playground, especially if it is hard, and tell them about the need for extra safety precautions over hard surfaces. The students may want to draw and record any unsafe conditions they find and report them to school or park officials.	

CONCEPT	ACTIVITIES	RELATED LEARNINGS
Safe playground behavior and courtesy	Children could act out in skit form or in puppet theaters (they may want to assume animal or other imaginary roles) instances when they have witnessed unsafe activities that either did or could have resulted in an accident, e.g., running under swings, twisting the chains, rough play, pushing, shoving around equipment, etc. Discuss how these types of behavior often result in accidents.	
Students can begin thinking analytically in terms of safe/unsafe as soon as they encounter a piece of equipment, with the goal in mind of preventing accidents.	The children can collect pictures of playground equipment from catalogs or magazines and analyze them for safety hazards. They can make a scrapbook or bulletin board with safe equipment on one side contrasted with unsafe equipment on the other. The same thing can be done with pictures or snapshots of a child using equipment or of pictures the children draw of safe and unsafe use.	
Pain and its possible prevention (especially on the playground)	Discuss experiences of physical pain. Discuss the body's reactions to pain, how the nerve endings are involved in communicating distress to the brain in the form of pain as a sign that the body part is in danger. Discuss bones and brittleness, blood, and how the impact of an object with the body or of the body with a hard surface can cause ruptures which, if they remain below the skin, appear as bruises, or if they break through, cause bleeding.	Biology, health, science
Playground and other safety precautions are part of the limits of time and space that all human beings encounter in the three-dimensional world of solid physical objects; our minds give us the capacity to focus our	Explain to the children that the force that requires them to hang on tightly with the lock grip to avoid falling from equipment is the same universal force that keeps the moon moving around the earth and the earth in orbit around the sun. Discuss how gravity pulls the body to earth. The children will probably be very interested in relating simple experiments with gravity performed within the classroom, to experiments using props and dummies on the playground equipment. These experiments can be the means for understanding why safety is a general human concern as well as a child's concern. Capture	Physics, chemistry, biology

CONCEPT	ACTIVITIES	RELATED LEARNINGS
attention on and understand these limitations and overcome them by learning to control and use them.	their interest in concepts such as gravity by questioning them on experiences that are concrete and within the realm of their actual experience on playground equipment, such as, What makes your body come down the slide? Why can't you slide up? Why does the pumping motion of your arms on the swing chains cause the swing to go higher? Why doesn't the swing continue going back and forth forever? Why does speed create a danger for moving bodies? How does your body stop and start? Why do you get hurt if you fall from a high distance and not hurt if you fall from a shorter distance? Why do some surfaces cause more harm than others when you fall on them? What causes hardness and softness? Concepts you can explore by beginning with their relationship to playground experiences include: acceleration, pendulum motion (swings), energy, force, movement, inertia, and balance. After investigating the concept, you can bring the children back to the subject of playground safety by having them discuss the reality of the physical world they have just learned about, and what it requires of people who want to live safely according to its physical laws. Point out that it is because of these realities and the challenge of mastering the knowledge of them that learning how to perform an activity safely is the real challenge and the real skill. Combining the concept of safety with a child's desire for exploration, as provided by the space program, might constitute a good, practical study model for the children.	

GENERAL ACTIVITIES

Choose a recess or playground time at a nearby day care center and have your children supplied with pencil and paper to write down everything they observe about the children at play, what they see and hear, and how it makes them feel.* They can discuss their observations in terms of safety.

Sentence completion games can be played by individuals or small teams. Supply each contestant with a sentence such as, "Reginald played safely on the monkey bars by_____." The children will get a point for each substitute word or phrase they can supply to truthfully complete the sentences. A time limit for each sentence can be set to keep the game moving quickly and to stimulate a wide variety of types of completions.

Ask the children to consider how feelings affect safety. First, ask them to list or draw expressions of various feelings such as anger, jealousy, worry, excitement, fear, or envy and to give real or made-up examples of them, with the class or group discussing whether or not the incident is a real example of the proposed emotion. They then can be asked to express the feeling in pantomime and a situation on the playground in which safety was affected by emotions either negatively (e.g., in a smaller child's envious copying of stunts that other children can undertake without risk) or positively (e.g., as in a child's concern for another child by warning him to duck to avoid being hit by a moving swing). Remind the children that in a pantomime, objects are suggested by pretend motions or expressions (no sounds) in relation to them or to other children.

Assign a group to find out: how public, park and school playground equipment is bought; who decides on the type of equipment to be installed; who inspects the equipment for good maintenance; who takes safety into consideration; who collects data on accidents involving equipment, etc. Assign a task force to investigate ways of making the playground safer (e.g., resurfacing a hard surfaced playground) and the means by which they would request funds or other help from the school or other organizations to accomplish these tasks.

Some students may want to keep a safety diary for the class in which they can record the safety projects they have undertaken and their effectiveness in preventing accidents. Children and the adults working with them can use this in evaluating the effectiveness of their learning activities and develop new ones from it.

Another approach would be to make a safety calenda for use by the class with safety messages and places to mark a perfect day (no accidents) or a day in which an accident has occurred. This is another way for safety to become a continuing concern for the class and to give them a goal (as many perfect days in each month as possible) to actively work toward.

Explain to the children that one way in which many children and adults have learned about the importance of safety is by trial and error because sometimes, when you take a risk, you don't get hurt; another time, however, you may get hurt and, until you do, you may keep taking risks, reasoning that accidents always happen to the "other guy." Ask the children to put themselves in the situation of a child considering whether or not to perform a stunt, take a risk, accept a dare, etc., and to write a monologue about this character in a particular situation involving playground equipment, without telling anything directly about the character but just expressing thoughts. You can vary the assignment by giving the students the option of creating a character who goes ahead

*Young children can tell you what they see and you can write it down. (Or record it on a portable cassette — they like mechanical devices.)

and takes a risk and allow them to decide his/her reactions on getting hurt or not getting hurt.

Moving from monologue to a dialogue, propose that the children write or act out a two-level conversation in which they include their characters' private thoughts along with their outward statements. A child asking an adult for permission to go to the playground by himself for the first time would be an example. By later discussing whether they themselves would have felt and talked the same way (and whether their parents would have, in the adult role), they can decide how true to life their dialogues were.

Some children may want to prepare a playground safety newsletter or magazine with reports of their activities and evaluations of the safety of the equipment on their playground. Other content might be:

A. Report of a child-conducted survey about children's feelings and concerns about playground safety.
B. Advertisements for safety.
C. A child-composed checklist of safety features that the children can give their parents on safe selection, maintenance, installation, and use of home playground items.
D. What to do when you find a safety hazard.
E. What to do when you see another child doing something unsafe as affected by his age.

Discuss the scientific method with children, explaining how a scientist observes matter and describes its activities by looking, listening, and feeling. After gathering many facts, the scientist forms a mental picture of how the facts are causally related to one another, and this proposed model is called a theory. The truth of a theory can be tested by performing experiments to determine what other results are possible. Suggest that the group apply scientific method to the problem of reducing the number of playground accidents. The children can use the statistics compiled by CPSC in Fact Sheet #22 and the CPSC Playground Safety Handbook as part of their observations. (It should be explained that statistics are collections of observations, or observation shorthand.) The children may want to conduct observations on their own playground, investigating accident reports and taking photographs or making short films of children at play. The group as a whole can propose theories concerning the factors their observations indicate can cause accidents on their playground. They can then discuss how to alter the factors to test whether their accident-causing theory is valid or needs modification. If they have decided the nine equipment dangers are causing most of the accidents on their playground, they can try taking corrective measures, e.g., marking the danger points with tape and/or conducting a poster and information campaign with the other children.

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