

Step 5 - Maintain

Every day playgrounds get stomped on, swung around, drummed on, and kicked. Playgrounds take a daily beating. And that means that even the toughest, strongest, most expensive playground will require maintenance sooner than you think. It's helpful to think of a playground like a garden. Planting a garden is not a one-off event - keeping a garden requires regular care and attention. So do playgrounds. Any playground that is unmaintained will eventually become unsafe. In this chapter we'll cover:

- + How to plan for the long term maintenance of the project throughout the playground process.
- + Sample maintenance checklists.
- + Advice on developing playground rosters to avoid over-stressing playground equipment.
- + Tips on creating playground rules.
- + Playground resources for teachers.



Planning for maintenance

Before you even begin your playground build, it is essential to know who will maintain it and how repairs will be funded. The cost to maintain locally built playgrounds is usually a very minimal amount each year, but when time and funds are not allocated the site can quickly fall to disrepair. It is important to consider the long-term sustainability of the project throughout the process by:

- + Involving the local community in the planning, design, and build to ensure high ownership of the project.
- + Building from low-cost, local materials so that when something breaks it is easy and affordable for the local community to repair.
- + Relying on local builders. In particular, make sure whoever will be tasked with regular maintenance checks and repairs is involved in the build. This way, they will have intimate knowledge of the project and how it was built.

Once your playground is complete, create a “repair kit” to make regular maintenance easy. Include things like a tin of grease/lubrication, extra rope, chain, extra bolts, nuts and washers, and a ratchet/spanner. Customize what you include depending on your site and keep it easily accessible.

Maintenance checklists

Basic daily visual checks of the playground should be done when teachers are supervising children. A comprehensive check of the playground should be carried out every three months. At the “Three Month Checkup” there will likely be small repairs needed. Doing this upkeep regularly will be much easier, cheaper, and safer than allowing elements to break before they are tended to. If any elements are damaged, children must not play on them until they are fixed.

Pay close attention for signs of wear on any timber or steel that horizontally spans more than 2m/6ft, such as bridges or the top pole on swing sets. The failure of these parts could cause injury, and they must be inspected regularly. Increased wear in these areas can be caused by having too many children use the swing or bridge at the same time. Rules should be in place to prevent overloading these elements, but as children are not always good at strictly following rules regular inspection is the best course of action. Below is a maintenance checklist that can be used as an example of a “Three Month Checkup.” Customize this chart depending on the elements on your playground.

Sample Playground Maintenance Checklist

Area	Results Yes, No, or n/a	Reason If "No," what is the reason?	Action Action to be taken, and when.	Scheduled Date	Completed Date and by whom
Are the swing hinges greased?					
Are all bolts/nuts on tire elements tightened?					
Are all rails on the cubby-house secured and are all surfaces free of splinters and protruding nails?					
Is the gate(s) in sound condition? Check hinges and closing devices.					
Is the perimeter fence free from any damage?					
Is the playground free of any sharp objects, including broken branches, pieces of metal, syringes, or glass?					
Is the playground free of rubbish and animal droppings?					
Is the sand/soft fall material at least 200mm deep?					

Playground rosters

In large schools, it can be problematic for all classes to play on the playground at the same time. Not only can it be unsafe, lead to accidents, and over-stress elements, but if it's too busy the younger or quieter kids will get crowded out or trampled. A playground roster can be helpful in managing the playground activity so that it operates smoothly, and within its intended capacity. The size of the school, schedule of the school day, number of students and classes will all have an effect on what the roster might look like. Here is an example of a simple student roster, which gives everyone equal time on the playground. Use this template to create one to suit your own needs.

Week 1	Recess	Lunch
Monday	Grade 1+2+3	Grade 4+5+6
Tuesday	Grade 4+5+6	Grade 1+2+3
Wednesday	Grade 1+2+3	Grade 4+5+6
Thursday	Grade 4+5+6	Grade 1+2+3
Friday	Grade 1+2+3	Grade 4+5+6
Week 2	Recess	Lunch
Monday	Grade 4+5+6	Grade 1+2+3
Tuesday	Grade 1+2+3	Grade 4+5+6
Wednesday	Grade 4+5+6	Grade 1+2+3
Thursday	Grade 1+2+3	Grade 4+5+6
Friday	Grade 4+5+6	Grade 1+2+3

Playground rules

Any rules for the playground should be developed by the adults and children at the site depending on what is appropriate for their context. Rules may need to change over time as issues arise. It can be helpful to include children in the creation of the rules to give them buy-in and ensure that their needs and concerns are met. Below is a list of sample rules that some schools have created. Use this as a template to write your own. Display the rules in a prominent place so they can easily be referred to.

Sample playground rules:

- + Only do what you feel confident to do.
- + Don't hurt anybody.
- + Be a good friend and let others join your games.
- + Listen to others and teachers.
- + Play safe and tell a teacher if someone is hurt.
- + Take care of the playground and don't damage equipment.
- + Look after the plants and trees in the playground.
- + No throwing sand.
- + If something is broken, tell a teacher.
- + Put your rubbish in the bin.

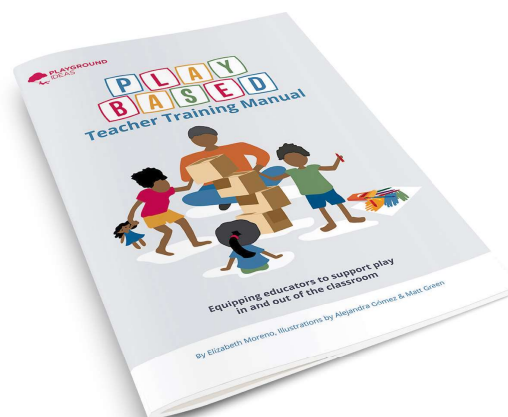


Teacher resources

Adding a playground to a school can be a big change! It's important to help teachers and staff utilize the site well and empower them to support children's play. These two Playground Ideas manuals are great resources for teachers and child care workers at a new playground site:

Play-Based Teacher Training Manual: Equipping educators to support play in & out of the classroom

Our “Teacher Training Manual” (playgroundideas.org/handbooks) covers a basic introduction to the importance of play for healthy child development. The manual provides encouragement for teachers and childcare workers to use the resources and play traditions within their own culture to support play both inside and outside the classroom. With beautiful illustrations on each page, teachers will be empowered with knowledge about the importance of creating time and space for play for the children in their care.



Loose Parts Manual: The DIY guide to creating a playground in a box

“Loose parts” is a term that refers to any material that can be moved, carried, stacked, or altered. Sticks, stones, cardboard boxes, ropes, milk crates - the possibilities are endless! Not only are loose parts cheap and easy to find, but they’re endlessly interesting to kids. Unlike fixed equipment, loose parts allow children to recreate their playground every day from the materials provided. Chock-full of beautiful illustrations and helpful tips and tricks, the Loose Parts Manual will guide you through gathering materials, setting up a storage and maintenance system, thinking through safety concerns, and training teachers. Adding loose parts to your playground is a fantastic way to improve and adapt the space over time.



Remember, if you have any maintenance questions, don't hesitate to contact us. Drop us an email at info@playgroundideas.org - we'd love to hear from you!