

Climbing trees in the playground

Dominion Road School



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Āwhina Hunga Whara



“Since the project has been in place, we have had no children becoming stuck up trees, and more importantly no children have fallen out of our school trees.” Marian Caulfield, Principal

Introduction

Children love to climb the trees that line the playground at Dominion Road School, an Auckland primary school with approximately 300 pupils. But climbing trees can result in injury. Not wanting to restrict the children’s play and physical activity, the school has come up with an innovative solution to ensure that climbing trees is made as safe as possible.

What was the issue?

Before this ThinkSafe Education project, the school’s policy was that children could only climb certain marked trees within the school grounds. However, there was no limit on how high or far out the pupils could climb in the marked trees, which could result in falls and injuries.

What did the school do?

Investigation:

The school started by re-assessing which trees and branches were safe or unsafe to climb. They not only examined the trees themselves for hazards such as dead branches, but also the areas around the trees should a child fall. For instance, one tree had a branch overhanging a narrow gap between a barbed wire fence and a nearby building, while another overhung a neighbour’s concrete driveway.

They also researched the number of broken bones and concussions during the past three years from school incident registers and data. From this, they were able to form a picture about the extent of the problem, which would help the students see the reasons behind the actions taken.

Interventions (action plan):

The action plan started with students brainstorming ideas to minimise the risk of falling or being stuck in trees. They walked around the school as a group and identified the trees and branches that they felt were unsafe to climb.

Some trees that had been marked as safe to climb were found to have some unsafe branches. Students sometimes climbed too high in the trees designated as safe, risking getting stuck or falling from a great height.

Rather than re-marking the whole tree as unsafe, the students came up with a solution which would allow them to continue climbing, but would prevent them going too high or onto unsafe branches. This was done by spray-painting 'stop' and 'go' markings on the branches, with bands of green paint ('go') showing safe areas to climb, and red bands ('stop') indicating the branches that were unsafe or too high.

What happened as a result?

Once the trees were painted, the children in the school learned about obeying the stop and go markings. Teachers brought their classes outside to look at the actual painted trees and discuss the markings. The programme used a holistic approach to injury prevention by allowing students to consider the pros and cons of risk taking and thinking about the dangerous situations they could get into while climbing trees.

Since the trees have been painted, the students have recognised and respected the green and red markings, and have taken on board the reasons behind them. Feedback from both the children and staff has been very positive.

How well did it work?

As a result of this project, teachers have observed that more children have been climbing the trees around the school - an encouraging show of physical activity. But the ThinkSafe Education intervention has meant that this increase in climbing has not resulted in any more children falling or becoming stuck.

What will they do in the future?

The school are delighted with the success of their *Climbing Trees* project. They will continue to monitor the situation, and make appropriate changes as the trees grow.

Want more information?
Visit www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention/schools.