

Preventing injury on playgrounds

Kristin School

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Te Kaporeihana Awhina Hunga Whara



“One of the highlights was how quickly and easily the students saw how their current playground behaviours were not always safe, and how they could modify these.”
Susan Cattell, Year 3 Team Leader

Introduction

Kristin School, a decile 10 independent co-educational school situated on the North Shore of Auckland, has 1,630 students aged 5 to 18. 520 of the students are in the primary school. With so many children, each year group has its own playground. Kristin’s ThinkSafe Education project looked at how they could reduce injuries caused while playing on these playgrounds.

What was the issue?

While on duty, a Year 3 teacher became concerned that students were receiving injuries while playing in their playground, which catered for 75 students. Some children suffered broken arms, banged heads, sore backs and assorted minor injuries. The teacher talked to the school nurse, who was also concerned at the potential for injury.

What did the school do?

Investigation:

The school nurse produced figures that showed that on average two students per week had to see her for an injury sustained in the playground. Of these, some had to seek further medical aid.

The separate playgrounds were created to provide increasing challenges for the different year groups. But the investigation showed that there was no education for the students on how to use the equipment safely and prevent injuries as they moved on to the next class.

The teacher observed and videoed behaviour, and was shocked to see how the students played. They ran on high bars, walked upright on top of a movable tunnel, played tag amongst the equipment, and pulled each other off the monkey bars.

Interventions (action plan):

To deal with the problem, the teacher planned a unit of work for her students. The first step was discussion with the students about what they thought was sensible playground behaviour, from which they made an essential agreement about safe behaviour.

Through drama, roleplays and taking videos, they demonstrated and reinforced what safe play looked like. Using thinking skills, they problem solved how to do things differently, and made posters to remind others about injury prevention.

The students also learned how to land and roll safely in case they fell off the bars or other high equipment.

What happened as a result?

The school has now adopted a policy that at the end of each year they take the students to the next playground and introduce them to safe behaviours. This is repeated on the first day of the new year to include any new students.

The PE teacher is teaching drop and roll techniques for landing safely, extended to all year levels and playgrounds.

Although the project was instigated by the teacher, she wanted the students to take ownership of it, and to be responsible for themselves and others. She realised this was starting to happen when she overheard one child saying to another, “Don’t overtake me on the bars – you know that’s not safe. I might get injured.”

How well did it work?

This was a very successful intervention for Kristin, as it effected some very real change for the school. While the goal was student safety on the Kristin playgrounds, the students transfer these practices to other playgrounds they visit.

The students have taken ownership. They were so interested that they wanted to monitor playground injury prevention themselves.

On a regular basis, students are telling others and their teachers about unsafe practices they see. Their posters are placed around the area to remind everyone about the agreement they have made to be playground safe.

What will they do in the future?

Kristin School will continue to monitor their accident register closely to identify if there are any other areas or danger spots around the school. These will then become the focus for further education and interventions.

As a result of this injury prevention project, the school is considering extending it to other areas. In particular, they intend to look further at the issues surrounding ergonomics for their students.

Want more information?

Visit www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention/schools.