



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on February 16, 2024

Playing Is Always Unsafe

The following note was passed along to us by a dad whose kids attend a public school in Texas. It says (emphasis mine):

Parents we need your help in keeping our children **safe** at the playground after hours and on the weekends.

It is important that children are **supervised at all times**. We have had reports of children climbing on the outside of the play equipment which is **really unsafe**. Some children are trying to sit on top of the big slide. This is completely unacceptable behavior.

We are reminding our children again today the same playground expectations apply in the afternoon, evening, and on weekends. They need to **play safely** and follow the expectations so they **do not get hurt**. If you are at the playground and notice **unsafe behavior** please remind them to **play safely**. Thank you for your help.



Lenore Skenazy

Signed, the Overlords of Overprotection — Well, not really. I suppose it was signed by the principal or superintendent. But as our secret source asks:

Did these people not climb trees as kids? I grew up in the '80s and '90s and loved climbing trees. Kids want to climb on stuff. We are primates!

Ah, but now we are primates with law degrees and an overactive sense of doom.

“Do not get hurt.” “Play safely.” “Keep our children safe.” “Unsafe behavior.” “Really unsafe.” In just 119 words, the school manages to use the word “safe” five times, suggesting the playground is a hellscape of danger. As hellscape require an ever-present boo-boo squad, that’s what parents are requested to become.

So — two thoughts.

No. 1: This is why I try not to blame “helicopter parents” for hovering. They live in a culture that sees a climb up the slide as Free Solo 2. This kind of LSD-level distortion is reinforced through propaganda like this school note. It simultaneously inflates the possibility of danger AND turns the job of parent into something new and all-encompassing. In 2024 America, your child is unsafe anytime their heinie hits



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the mulch chips, so you must be with them lest that horror occur. Have a nice life! Bring snacks! And if you're not there, the school will receive "reports."

No. 2: There's an alternative to outdoor play that does not require a parent giving up all their free time. In this alternate world, kids can hang out with friends, talk, joke, climb, slide, ride and play to their hearts' content. Heck, they can fly, and turn into dragons and meet real people from across the world. And it fits in their pocket! Every minute they are prohibited from playing in the real world is another minute they can be on a screen. If kids' real-world playtime is limited to parents' real-world free time, phones become their default playground.

And it's default (ha, ha) of policies like this. Obviously, the school is worried about risk and lawsuits. And yet, it was just last week that polite, careful CANADA woke up from its own safety coma. After years of things like decommissioning beloved toboggan hills, requiring helmets on the playground and investigating parents who let their kids under-age-12 walk around unsupervised, the Canadian Paediatric Society announced that, actually, kids NEED "risky play."

Why? Because their mental and physical health has been plummeting all the years they've been getting "safer."

If a culture is trying to err on the side of safety, it cannot ignore the downside of prohibiting kids from playing at the local playground without a security detail.

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