

parenting kids

Does fencing playgrounds make them safer or does it encourage lazy parenting?

A PLAYGROUND petition is leaving parents divided. Should all playgrounds be surrounded by a fence? Kate Fagan says no.

KATE FAGAN

news CONTINUED MAY 29, 2015 3:11PM

I USED to do pub crawls. Now I do park crawls. And I'm a bit of a kid's park connoisseur, to be honest.

I know which park is close to the good coffee and a clean public toilet. I know where I'll get free parking and where my one year old will have a soft landing when she stacks it. I know where to find shade at any time of the day and which slippery slide burns bottoms after 11am.

But I'm yet to find a park where I can take my kids and "check out" of parenting.

Because I know that while it is one of the simplest of family outings, going to the park ain't no walk in the park.

Newcastle Mum Louise Carey has heard enough mums complain about how exasperating a trip to the park can be, and has taken action by petitioning the local council to erect more fences around playgrounds.



If one group of parents get their way all playgrounds will look like this — fenced. Source: News Corp Australia

"Some kids have more of an exploring nature, or are what you'd call 'runners.' And when some of the mothers are heavily pregnant or breastfeeding, you start to notice the issue where we are really struggling to find outdoor play areas where we could supervise that number of children without danger," says Mrs Carey.

The petition calls to fence playgrounds located near bus stops and bodies of water

MORE IN PARENTING



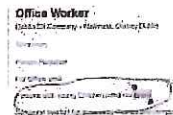
The rich parents being 'nannied'



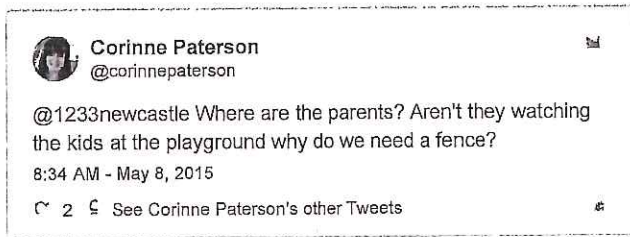
Warning: We're going on a 6-hour flight with a toddler



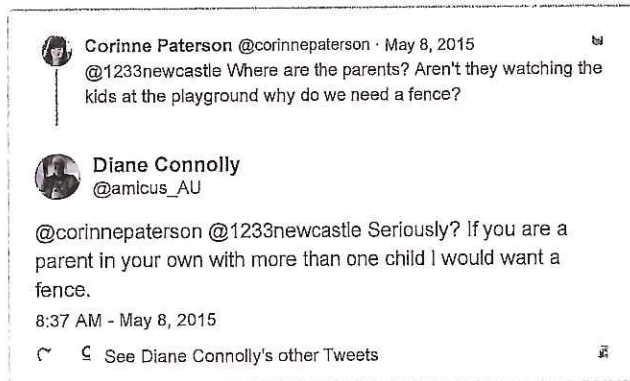
Messed up 'invisible prank' going viral



Shocking job advert's 'offensive request'



On the other side of the fence, mothers with multiple children say that there is only one of them and if they are caring for another child, or if the park is busy, they simply can't keep up with super-fast ninja toddlers.



And grandparents, who are an increasingly vital part of the playground crowd also have trouble catching the runners.

"We do have a growing demographic of grandparents who are becoming significant carers while parents are being forced back into the work force — a situation Tony Abbot is pushing harder for — so we're going to see a lot of grandparents taking up a greater role," says Mrs Carey.

advertisement

Having more fenced playgrounds might help that segment of parents and carers relax a little. But when the relaxing outweighs the supervising, problems start.

A slippery dip, for example, requires a certain angle of steepness in order to generate slip. To get that angle, you need height, and as a result most playgrounds are built over head. Over Dad's head, that is.

I once had the gut-wrenching experience of watching my 18-month-old son topple off a high playground bridge and splat into the bark below while I dared to sit on the park bench three too-far metres away. He didn't break anything but he was winded and I was terrified.

Then you've got the kids being kids thing. It's rare to find anyone in the excited under-fives gang much concerned about the wellbeing of others. Big kids bash about, little kids get in the way and smash stuff up. Lots of things happen that need parental intervention. These little kids are just learning about how to behave in the world, and they need guidance.

Most parents, most of the time are all in it together. But there have been times when I have had to wonder in my sternest mother voice, "where are that child's parents?!"

Last weekend I was at a park with my kids and there was "an incident" (said in the snootiest tone possible) where a little boy was throwing sand at kids as they hurtled out of the slippery slide tunnel. He thought it was great fun, but of course the other kids didn't. With his parent or carer nowhere to be seen, I asked him to stop, as did, I noticed, another mum. It was bit awkward trying to correct the behaviour of a stranger, and it was worse still when he ignored us.

I'm quite sure if that boy's parents saw him doing that

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been worried about how some kids — mine included — treat others. I like to be close to make sure they try to do better.

I'm on the side of the fence that thinks parents need to take more responsibility at the park, not less.





Risk Assessment Sheet

| | |
|---|--|
| Task / Item Review Playground Main Road Longford | Assessed by : David Cookson for Wayne Chellis |
|---|--|

Location Main Road Longford


Date 20th July 2012

Details: Request to identify potential problems with the playground in line with requests from the public

| Risk Issues / Hazards | Rationale | Comments |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Lack of fence / barrier | The playground does not have a protective fence | Australian Standards do not require fencing of playgrounds if a risk assessment on the area has been performed. AS/NZS ISO 31000 |
| Lack of signage | The playground has no signage | Australian Standards do require adequate signage in line with identified risks. AS/NZS ISO 31000 |
| On-going Maintenance | There are procedures and maintenance requirements within Council | Australian Standards do require that an appropriate inspection and maintenance program be established AS/NZS ISO 31000 |
| Playground Equipment | All playground equipment must meet Australian Standards | All playground equipment must meet Australian Standards AS4685 / AS4486.1 |
| Playground Surfacing Specifications | Immediate playground areas must meet Australian Standards | All playground surface must meet AS/NZS 4422 |







Calculate the Risk Factor (Refer to the sheets on exposure, probability and consequence)

| Risk Level <i>Exposure X Consequence X Probability</i> | Low Risk | Moderate Risk | Substantial Risk | High Risk | Very High Risk |
|---|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | Score 1 to 8 | Score 9 to 25 | Score 26 to 80 | Score 81 to 720 | Score Above 720 |

| Hazard | Score & Rating | Suggested Actions |
|---------------|---|--|
| Lack of fence | Low Risk  | <p>AS/NZS ISO 31000 requires a risk assessment to determine should fencing be established. We have assessed that fencing is not required due to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sufficient space between the playground and a busy road exists * No dog park, cycle way, water way, exists near the playground * There are a number of natural barriers within the area * The area is located in a manner which enables it to be publicly supervised by |




Risk Assessment Sheet

| | | |
|--|---|---|
|   |    | <p>passer-by and neighbourhood watch schemes</p> <p>* The playground is situated so that it can be seen from adjacent houses and streets</p> <p>Therefore it is not deemed to be a risk that can justify the cost of fencing. (refer photographs attached)</p>  |
| <p>Lack of Signage</p> | <p>Low to Moderate Risk</p> | <p>There is always a need to have appropriate signage in place. Unsupervised playgrounds should be appropriately signposted to indicate the identified risks including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Contacting emergency / Council services * Appropriate telephone contact numbers for reporting problems * That children under the age of eight should be accompanied by an adult * Any other hazard identified in a risk assessment |
| <p>On-going Maintenance</p> | <p>Substantial Risk</p> | <p>We have been assured that a substantial yearly maintenance program is in place at Council. This should be reviewed to ensure it meets the AS/NZS ISO 31000</p> |
| <p>Playground Equipment</p> | <p>Substantial Risk</p> | <p>We have been assured that policy and procedures are in place where ONLY playground equipment that meets the AS4685 / AS4486.1</p> |



Risk Assessment Sheet

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| <p>Playground Surfacing Specifications:</p> | <p>Substantial Risk</p> | <p>Our inspection of the surface showed that it met the correct type and depth of material.</p>  |
|---|-------------------------|--|

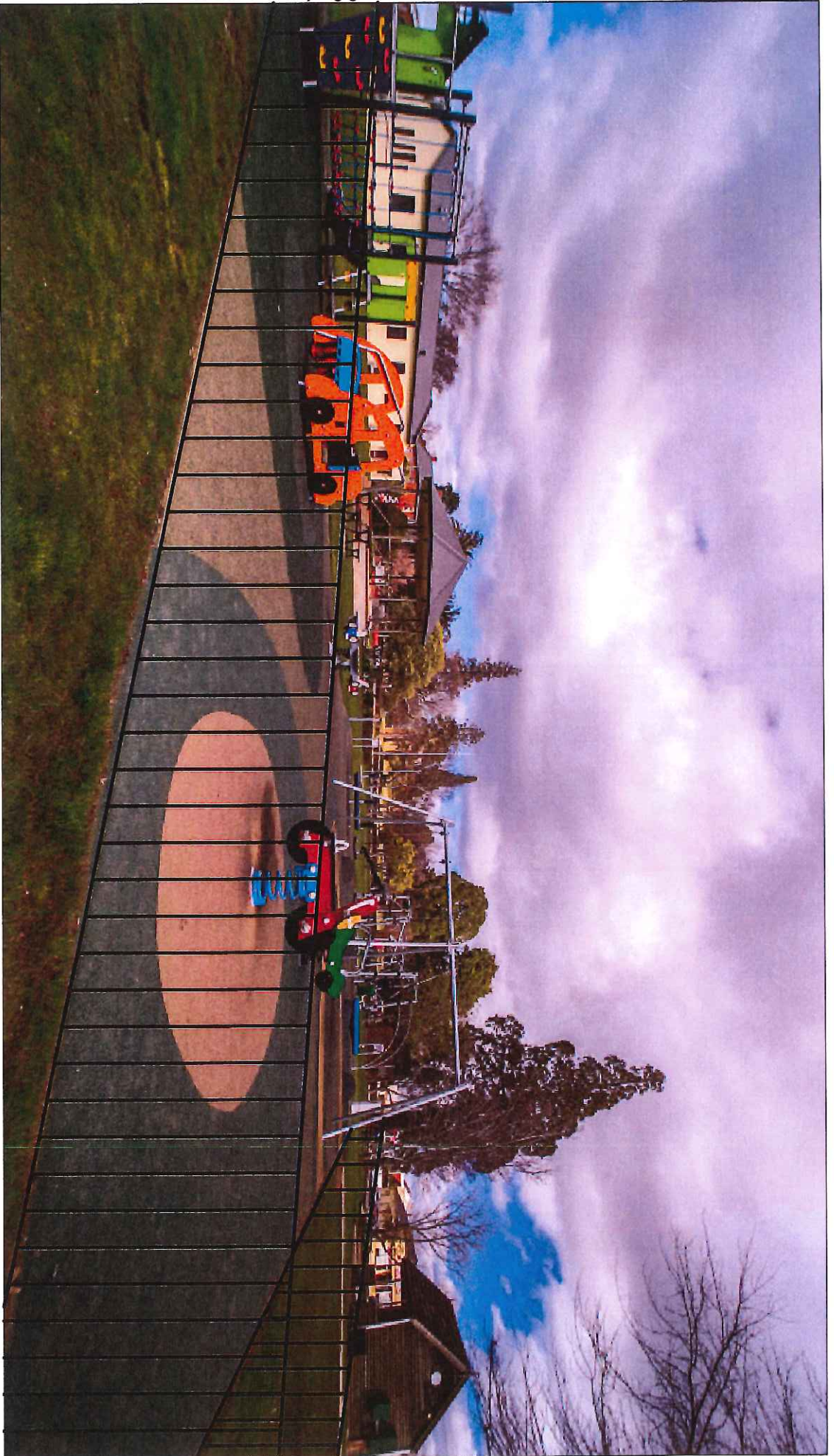
Control Details Recommended

1. There is no reason that a playground fence is required.
2. Appropriate signage is required and should be sited so that it is easily seen when the public approaches the playground. It will need to meet Australian Standards
3. Review with an internal audit the yearly maintenance program. Ensure that the surface type and depth is checked.
4. Review the policy and procedures for the purchase and replacement of playground equipment. Ensure that they meet the Australian Standards.

David Cookson

David Cookson C.P.M.S.I.A.

Date 28th July 2011



Example of playground fence shown over existing equipment