

Our Overcautious Society is Hurting Children

I walked by my childhood playground a few months ago. The massive wood structure, steep slides, and high swings were gone, replaced by a much smaller – and safer – set of plastic equipment.

Such a change is a common occurrence these days – after all, we want our kids to be safe, right? But according to occupational therapist Angela Hanscom, safer playground equipment may actually be harmful to children, because it removes important “sensory and motor challenges” which children need to properly grow and develop.

Writing in [The Washington Post](#), Ms. Hanscom notes:

“We’ve taken away merry-go-rounds and teeter-totters. Swing spans have decreased and slides and climbing structures are surprisingly close to the ground. Kids appear to master the equipment at a young age. When the equipment no longer presents an age-appropriate challenge for the children, they quickly become bored and indifferent to the plastic play pieces. Or worse, they use them in ways that they were never intended for – making the situation unsafe in today’s standards.

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Children need rapid, changing, and accelerating movement on a daily basis. They need to swing high up into the air, they need to sled down large hills, they need to spin in circles just for fun, and even hang upside down from the monkey bars. These types of movements are very therapeutic to the growing child and support attention and school-readiness. When children’s movement opportunities are chronically restricted or limited due to [insufficient playtime outdoors](#), playground

equipment that no longer challenges, or too much time sitting at a desk, we often start to see problems with sensory and motor skills, body awareness, self-regulation, and simply focusing in the classroom.”

Thomas Jefferson [once said](#), “If the body be feeble, the mind will not be strong.” Could the over-cautious, cushioned attitude toward children which society continues to encourage be a culprit behind many of the behavioral and even academic problems we see in the up and coming generations?

Image Credit: Minneapolis Park History