

Doctor offers tips for playground safety

When Dr. Maria Brown takes her 2-year-old daughter to the playground, she makes sure she's right behind her when the toddler climbs onto the slide or tests out the swings.

"Things happen really quickly," warned Dr. Brown, a pediatrician at St. Agnes Hospital, Baltimore, and a parishioner of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation in Baltimore.

"A lot of moms will stand 30 or 40 feet away, she said. "There's nothing you can do at that distance if there's an accident or something goes wrong."

Active supervision of their children is the most important way parents can help make sure their little ones are safe at the playground, Dr. Brown said. But there are other practical steps the pediatrician said parents can take to ensure safety.

Citing recommendations from the American Association of Pediatricians (AAP), Dr. Brown said it's important to make sure playground equipment is secure. Parents should carefully assemble home equipment, placing it on a flat surface and anchoring it firmly to the ground.

Equipment should be installed at least six feet from fences or walls, she said, and the surface under it should be energy absorbent and safety-tested.

Swing seats should be made of something soft, not wood or metal, according to Dr. Brown. Screws and bolts should be capped and parents should check for loose nuts and bolts and broken, rusty or sharp parts, according to the AAP.

"You want to make sure your children are using age-appropriate equipment," said Dr. Brown, noting that parents should look at the space between bars to see if it fits their child's reach.

The most common playground injuries are fractures (broken bones), according to Dr.

Brown. Other injuries include concussions, cuts and scrapes and sometimes internal injuries like lacerated spleens, she said.