

## **Fencing (from the Good Playspace Guide)**

### **Why fence a playground?**

There are many families and groups who are unable to visit playgrounds unless they are fenced because their children run off, are unable to hear or understand their name, are easily distracted, or become absorbed in an activity and do not notice they have moved away from their carers. For these groups, a high fence with a gate is important.

When a site is close to a hazard such as a water body, busy road, or steep cliffs, a fence makes many adults more comfortable about their children's safety.

Fences help contain balls and separate play spaces from neighbouring park uses such as dog-off-leash areas. A fence can also prevent fouling of sand or mulch in a play space by animals.

### **Disadvantages of fencing**

A major disadvantage of fencing a play space from the rest of a park is that it limits where play activities can take place, or effectively 'cages' play into a contained space.

It is virtually impossible for people who use wheelchairs to reach child-proof locks on gates, making fenced spaces with these systems inaccessible to some users. In addition, gates and child-proof locks regularly fail in public parks and the cost of replacing locks can be expensive over time.

Fences can also be used as an excuse not to supervise children properly.

### **Design of fences or barriers**

When considering a fence for a play space, it is important to think clearly about its purpose and make sure its design is consistent with that purpose.

Every municipality should aim to provide a few fenced play spaces, so there is a variety of options for parents and carers whose children require additional protection.

However, natural barriers such as hedges (or another type of planting or design feature) can provide the same sense of containment as a fence, especially for small children. These options should be considered in the planning process.

Things to consider when designing fences for play spaces are:

- double-width gates for maintenance access;
- an alternative to locks to overcome the problem of inaccessibility to wheelchair users;
- single rail fences for visual definition, but these do not effectively contain children;
- no horizontal components that can be climbed, nor entrapment spaces or sharp components;
- no cables or wire fencing that is not easily seen at night or by a person with a vision impairment;
- planting and earthworks to help disguise a fence and make it less unattractive. Planting should not totally block views into the space, or support an agile child to climb over a fence;
- designs for fences that make it a playful feature of the space;
- partial fencing that deters children from a quick run out onto a hazard in one direction; and
- seats near the openings in partial fences to make 'control' easier for adults.