



#PlayToday

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*promoting the value of play*

## **MONKEY BARS AND HORIZONTAL LADDERS**

Monkey bars are excellent for building a child's upper body strength and agility. They have stood the test of time and continue to be extremely popular with children.

### ***Safety***

Monkey bars are well represented in injury data, firstly because they get a lot of use as children love using them, and secondly because some children are using bars that are too high for them.

Risks associated with falls from monkey bars can be substantially reduced when:

- appropriate soft undersurfacing is installed and regularly maintained;
- there is a choice of height of equipment so that smaller children are able to develop their skills (if you can install only one, install at the lowest recommended height);
- wide landing platforms are installed at each end;
- the clearances between any fixed overhead rung or handgrip and the standing surface (e.g. rungs, steps, platform or playground surface) used to gain access to the overhead components are the same at each end; and
- adults are discouraged from lifting children up to equipment that the child would normally be unable to reach.

Like any other item of playground equipment, monkey bars should comply with the requirements of Australian standard AS4685 and be certified as compliant by the manufacturer at the time of installation.

### ***Monkey Bar Height***

Australian Standards specify a maximum height for monkey bars and similar upper body equipment of 2.2m (1.8m for Supervised Early Childhood Services), however monkey bars should be no higher than is required to get a typical child's feet off the ground.

Assuming a standard 300mm high landing/launch platform at each end, if there is only one monkey bar Play Australia recommends that the top bar should be set no higher than 1500mm above the undersurfacing. If it is possible to have two or more monkey bars these should start at 1500mm high, then 1800mm, then 2100mm to allow children to advance to higher bars as they grow taller.

### ***Construction***

Play Australia recommends that monkey bars should be installed with a wide deck at each end, approximately 300mm high, to facilitate use without the intervention of parents and carers, and to support safe mounting and dismounting.

Manufacturers and designers might also give consideration to using rounded (graspable) side bars on the horizontal ladder (instead of square) so that these can be used as an alternative point to clamber and hang from.

Although many very elaborate monkey bar-like structures are available in the market, with curves, twists, hanging roman rings and other additions, difficulty should not be confused with play value. Arches, in particular, can be almost impossible for many children to negotiate as the user is required to fight against gravity in order to climb upwards towards the apex of the arc.

Note that in many cases the simplest equipment will offer the greatest play value due to its adaptability to a variety of different ages and physical, creative and social uses.