

Bounce Houses, Slides and other Inflatable Amusements

HOW CAN YOU KEEP THEM FROM CAUSING INJURIES?

Renting a bounce house, slide, or other inflatable for ministry events has become a popular way to entertain kids (and their parents). Nothing draws people to a community outreach event like an inflatable slide towering several stories high.

When set up and supervised appropriately, these inflatable amusements can provide a lot of fun. However, they can also lead to injuries. More than 4,000 emergency room visits a year in the United States are linked to inflatables, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates.

Injuries reported include concussions, neck injuries, broken bones, cuts, and bruises. Several deaths have occurred from head injuries sustained after falls from inflatables.

Most injuries, according to the CPSC, are caused by children colliding with one another when several are jumping or sliding at the same time; falls from the inflatable onto a hard surface outside; people doing head-first jumps, slides, or flips; wind gusts blowing over improperly secured inflatables; and rapid deflation of inflatables due to fan power loss.

You can prevent many of these injuries by following manufacturers' guidelines for set-up, operation, and supervision. Please read these recommendations before renting an inflatable for your next youth or community event.

PLANNING THE EVENT BEFORE RENTING AN INFLATABLE

- Contact your insurance agent to discuss your ministry's liability exposure.
- Rent your equipment from a reputable company that has liability insurance and employs people who are experienced and trained in operating inflatables.
- Arrange for the rental company's staff to set up and operate the equipment, whenever possible.

- Get written instructions on how to safely use the equipment.
- Ask an attorney to review the rental contract before you sign it.
- Have the company give you written proof of a current liability insurance policy. This insurance covers the rental company's liability—not yours—in the event of an injury.

If you consider buying an inflatable bounce house or slide, you should carefully consider the liability exposures that you will assume on a continuing basis, including set-up, use, and long-term maintenance.

SETTING UP INFLATABLES

Inflatables are heavy, bulky, and awkward to move. To secure them properly, they must be properly anchored to the ground, possibly with additional sandbags for weight. We recommend having your rental company set up the inflatables, whenever possible. Even if they do, it's important to pay attention to the following details, which can affect a unit's safety.

WHEN SETTING UP INFLATABLES, ENSURE:

- There are no high winds.
- Surfaces are dry.
- A tarp is placed on the ground to protect the bottom of the unit. If no tarp is available, clear all debris from the area where the bounce house will be placed.
- The unit is placed on flat, dry ground, away from trees.
- The inflatable object is moored to the ground using every anchor point provided, plus the recommended amount of sandbags or weights.
- Impact-absorbing mats cover the hard surfaces to the open side(s) of the equipment, unless you intend to have spotters supervise these openings.

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- No rips or tears are visible when the unit is inflated.
- The unit fully inflates and isn't sagging anywhere.
- The operator covers all operating and safety procedures, both verbally and in writing, including weight and occupancy limits.

DURING THE EVENT

1. A responsible ADULT, 18 or older, must supervise the inflatable amusement rides at all times.
2. Supervision is critical. Don't leave the inflatable unattended, or children could enter it without an adult's knowledge.
3. Before being allowed to enter an inflatable unit, people should remove shoes, jewelry, eyeglasses, hair clips, and other sharp objects that may injure others.
4. Prohibit food, drink, and gum in the unit.
5. Limit the number of people on an inflatable structure according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
6. Do not allow people to perform flips, somersaults, or engage in rough play inside a bounce house.
7. Don't let occupants bounce against the sides of a bounce house or rock it from side to side, which could cause it to tip over.
8. An adult should group children according to age and size during play. Mixing children of different sizes increases the risk of injury.
9. It's best that children don't sit or lie down while others are bouncing around them, since a jumping child could fall onto a sitting or lying child.
10. Remove children from a bounce house once they tire to reduce the risk of injury.
11. If an inflatable unit deflates, remove occupants at once to prevent injury.
12. If winds start affecting the structure, or if you see rain, lightning, or any other unsafe condition, get all people out of the inflatable, then turn off the blower motor until conditions improve.
13. Don't attempt to move an inflatable structure once it has been set up.