

# Fencing and Boundaries

The boundaries of a safe play area should be designated when in the planning stages of building a safe play area. Boundaries prevent or deter children from entering areas where farm work is taking place.

Physical boundaries are safest and most appropriate for children less than 6 years of age. Older children require wider boundaries with larger play spaces not contained by a fence. Signs indicating play boundary limits can help remind children where play boundaries are located. Supervision should always accompany children's play. Guidelines for selecting safe, appropriate fencing are listed below:

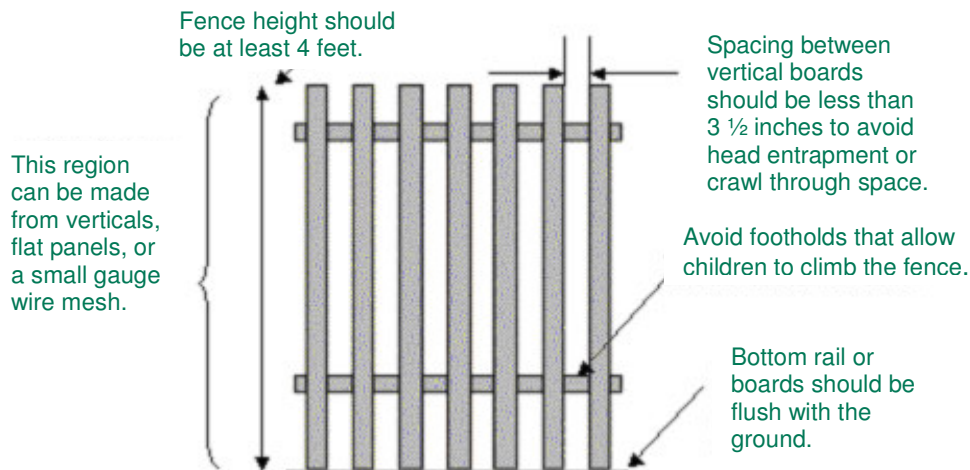
## Fencing do's

- Select a fence with a height sufficient to keep children inside, while keeping hazards outside. A recommended minimum height is 4 feet.
- Make sure space openings between vertical fence boards are less than 3½ inches to avoid head entrapment and to prevent children from sliding through the fence.
- Use vertical fence boards instead of horizontal. Horizontal fence boards on certain fences (e.g. post and rail) provide handholds and footholds making it easier for a child to climb the fence.
- Choose a sturdy fence to define boundaries and control the flow of people in and out of a space:
  - Chain link fences are a good choice, offering stability and safe openings. Chain link fences should not have exposed points extending upward.
  - Solid fencing, such as tongue-and-groove or semi-privacy panels, are effective for minimizing exposures to noise and dust.
- Ensure that woven or mesh wire, if used, is of sufficient gauge and supported with the correct number of posts and braces to provide stability. It should have tight weave with small openings so as not to provide a foothold allowing children to climb. Fence may be doubled-up to offset the mesh openings, thereby reducing size. Some woven wire (e.g. chicken wire) is not sturdy to withstand the potential impact of children at play and should not be used.
- Hedge and shrub rows, if used, should be thick enough to define boundaries. Note that hedges and shrubs may still allow children a space to crawl through.

## Fencing don'ts

- Avoid fences with pointed picket tops as they pose a potential head entrapment hazard and can impale a child attempting to climb over the top.
- Avoid wooden or plastic snow fence as it may easily break or splinter, and children can crawl beneath it. Snow fence is not a permanent structure and may be easily knocked down by children.
- Avoid barbed wire and multiple strand high-tensile wire fencing.
- Avoid using one fence as a dual-purpose animal confinement boundary AND safe play boundary.

## General Guidelines for Child Protective Fencing



### Gates and Latches

- Choose sturdy gates and latching mechanisms that children cannot open.
- Minimize the number of gates to reduce the risk of gates being left open.
- Ensure the gate is consistent in height and strength with the fence to maintain child protective properties.
- Position gate latching mechanisms high so they are not accessible to younger children.
- Use proven child protective latches, such as an automatic latch with an automatic gate closing mechanism used in pool fencing gates.

To locate a fence and fence related products source for your safe play area, contact a hardware store, farm supply store, home improvement retailer or fencing contractor in your area. Useful Internet sites include:

- Hoover Fence Company (<http://www.hooverfence.com/>)\*
- Fence Center (<http://www.fencecenter.com/>)\*
- Master Halco (<http://www.fenceonline.com/>)\*

\*The National Farm Medicine Center does not endorse specific companies, but offers these as examples.

Some content of this publication was adapted from "Safe Play Areas on Farms", Farmsafe Australia, 2004, <http://www.farmsafe.org.au/>.

Visit <http://research.marshfieldclinic.org/children/> or call 1-800-662-6900.