



Let Kids Be Kids

By Nicole Kaeding

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Forecasts of snow delight children. Snow is the harbinger of hot chocolate, no school and fun winter activities like skiing, making snowmen or my personal favorite, sledding. If some local lawmakers have their way, sledding will join an ever-growing list of bad behaviors. Banning sledding is an absurd proposal.

Multiple Midwestern localities have imposed bans and restrictions on sledding in recent years following several large lawsuits, including \$2 million in Omaha, Nebraska, and \$2.75 million in Sioux City, Iowa. The financial risk posed to the town by allowing sledding could be substantial. In the event that a child is injured, localities run the risk of expensive legal bills.

The fear of sledding injuries is much greater than the actual physical risk. According to a paper published in the journal [Pediatrics](#), from 1997 to 2007, roughly 20,000 children annually visited emergency departments because of sledding injuries. Broken bones, contusions and abrasions comprised over half of all injuries. Only four percent required hospitalization, meaning most injuries were relatively minor.

But the absolute injury rate lacks context and this fuels hype about the alleged dangers of sledding. Twenty thousand injured children is less than 0.03 percent of all children in the United States, making sledding a minor cause of childhood injuries. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reports](#) that about 300,000 children – 15 times as many – were seen in emergency departments for injuries sustained while riding a bicycle in 2007. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 200,000 children [were injured](#) in motor vehicle crashes in 2007. Crossing the street [presents](#) a 1 in 701 chance of being killed. Riding in a car, biking and crossing the street are much riskier than sledding, yet local governments aren't trying to ban walking, driving and biking for kids.

This is part of a much larger trend in which governments are banning ordinary activities in the name of safety. Seattle recently ordered equipment [removed](#) from a play area for special-needs children, citing safety risk, never mind that no child had ever been significantly injured there during the playground's nine-year history. A school district in Washington state is [eliminating](#) all swings on its playgrounds. And a Virginia school district [blocked](#) the use of a playground that met all national and international safety standards because a child might be injured.

The quest for safety doesn't mean that we eliminate all the fun in childhood. Kids should be kids. As parents, we should teach our children to look, understand, listen and assess their surroundings. Parents can take precautions to ensure their child's safety that are well short of an outright sledding ban. Ensuring the sledding hill is free of impediments and taking a test run to confirm its safety are simple ideas. Requiring your child wear a helmet is also a smart idea.

Life involves risk. Just like when I put my daughter into a properly installed car seat and make her hold my hand to cross the street, I demonstrate how to make safe, smart choices, a parent's personal responsibility. Banning sledding is just another absurd item fostered by overzealous safety experts.

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