



**TOYOTA | EVERGREEN**  
LEARNING GROUNDS  
*Imagine your city with nature*

## Maintaining Your New School Ground

When planning school grounds design, the two greatest concerns expressed by parents and teachers are those of vandalism and safety. There are many things that can be done to help deter vandalism and to ensure that children and other users are kept safe while using the space. These strategies fall into two categories: site design; and community involvement.

### Appropriate site design

If students, teachers, and the local community feel that the school ground area is safe, they will be more likely to use it. Studies have shown that as regular site usage increases, vandalism and safety concerns decrease.

The key then, is to make the area feel safe. Here are the key factors to consider when designing the project:

- **Physical layout**
  - Include visible paths in the design.
  - Post signs displaying maps of the area and showing the user's current location.
  - Offer orientation sessions.
- **Clear sight lines**
  - Facilitate views so that people can see around them.
  - Ensure visibility from all perimeter lines.
  - Allow a clear view for police monitoring of the area.
- **Lighting**
  - Adequate lighting will encourage positive uses of the area after dark and discourage undesirable activities.
- **Access**
  - Plan for more than one entry and exit point to the naturalized area.
- **Maintenance**
  - Ensure adequate maintenance of the project. An area that looks cared for feels safer and is less prone to vandalism.
- **Diversity**
  - Make the area suitable for a variety of activities. This will increase positive use of the area and make it safer.
- **Signs**
  - A sign can communicate to the community what the project is intended to achieve and who to contact for questions.





Signs



Accessibility



Community Involvement

### Practical Design Tips for Safety

- Avoid placing dense shrubs or small trees directly beside a path or seating area.
- Maintain an open area along both sides of trails of paths and choose plants not taller than 60 centimetres.
- To reduce access to hiding spots, choose thorny plants such as raspberries and rose bushes to line paths adjacent to wooded areas.
- Maintain open sight lines at trail intersections and at approaches to bridges, buildings and other possible hiding areas.

Adapted from Daigle, J. and Havinga, D., Restoring Nature's Place. p. 77

### Community Involvement

The more you encourage the direct involvement of the community, the more you reduce vandalism. Students will attest to this. At one school a group of Grade 6 students came across some broken trees in their naturalization project. Apparently they knew that some of the older students had done it. When asked how this might be prevented in the future, they suggested that future project work should include older students so that they too would have a vested interest in the project. When people feel a sense of ownership for an initiative, they are likely to be protective of it rather than destructive. For this reason, it is imperative to involve multiple community stakeholders. In addition to considering the site design and involving the community, there are some other things you can do to prevent vandalism and ensure greater safety:

- If an incident of vandalism does occur, address it immediately. Restore the damaged area by cleaning up or replanting. This sends a strong message that the initiative is important to the school and the community.
- Involve the local police in designing and protecting the area. Invite their input on the project plans and whether there are any safety concerns. Ask if they can include the area in their nightly surveillance of the neighbourhood.
- Involve the neighbours whose properties border the school grounds.
- Document vandalism and safety trends before any changes are made to the area. If there is an incident that occurs after the project is under way or completed, it can be compared with previous trends. Knowing what happened before the project began will tell you whether anything has changed – including for the better.