



## Why “Children at Play” Signs are Not Recommended



Traffic signs are installed on our roadways for many reasons. They may inform us of the need to stop, the speed limit, street names or which direction to go. Signs help us obey the laws, find our destination, and keep us from running off the road. They help us to be safe whether we are a motorist, bicyclist or pedestrian.

Proper signage also helps make communities more livable and streets safer. Residents often view the street in front of their homes as more than just a place for cars. They may use the road as a walking path, a place to stop and chat with neighbors, or an extension of their front yard where some may allow their children to play. Often, residents request road signs which they believe will make their community safer.

Many agencies receive requests for “SLOW CHILDREN”, “CHILDREN AT PLAY” or “SLOW CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs. After all, children play in or near the road and shouldn’t there be some warning given to drivers? But do they really help? Are these signs OK to use?

The first place to look for advice is the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). This is a federal document that provides guidance on how to use traffic signs and which signs are appropriate. Connecticut law requires the use of this manual for traffic control.



The MUTCD does not include “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs or any variation. But why is this?

**There are several reasons that “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs are not recommended.**

**Here are just a few:**

- They are typically designed to look like warning signs, with a black legend on a yellow background. Other warning signs provide information on specific locations of the hazard (intersection, pedestrian crossing, curve, etc.).
- “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs merely inform a driver that children may be in or near the road.
- Motorists should expect children to be at play in all residential areas, and the lack of signing on some streets may indicate otherwise.
- These signs do not provide guidance to motorists as to a safe speed.
- “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs could give a false sense of security in letting children play in the roads. In fact, no level of signage could ever protect a pedestrian when they are struck by a vehicle.
- Studies have shown that “CHILDREN AT PLAY” signs do not reduce the speed of traffic or make drivers more observant.
- When you install signs not in conformance with the MUTCD, you could be creating liability for your local agency.

**Some things to consider when a resident requests a “CHILDREN AT PLAY” sign include:**

- Does the street have sidewalks, or does the volume of pedestrian traffic make sidewalks a consideration?
- Does the street have well graded clear shoulders or grass strips where pedestrians can walk or wait where they can be adequately seen by a driver?
- Does the roadway have a speed limit sign in the area? Some streets do not have speed limit signs, and other streets go a long distance without any. A speed limit is a clear message to a driver regarding their speed of travel. A good rule of thumb is to have a speed limit sign every minute of travel.
- If there is an area where pedestrians and cyclists are regularly using the road a pedestrian warning sign may be used along with a share the road sub-plaque MUTCD sign designation W11-2 and W16-1.

**Most importantly parents and guardians should instruct their children on the dangers of playing near or in the street.**

References:

<http://www.ct.gov/dot/lib/dot/documents/dstc/mutcd.pdf>

[http://www.ct.gov/dot/lib/dot/documents/dstc/regulations\\_part1.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dot/lib/dot/documents/dstc/regulations_part1.pdf)

<http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/>

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