

# Protecting Our Parishes, Missions, and Schools

## Inflatable Bounce Houses, Moon Walks, Jumpers Are All The Rage For Children—But Are They Safe?

They're fun and they're popular. Inflatable bounce houses or jumpers are the rage with kids and families, but you may not know they can also be deadly.

On weekends, you can't drive through most neighborhoods without seeing one in someone's front yard or driveway.



But as with any recreation, proper precautions need to be taken. That includes adults resisting the temptation to get into the jumper with your kids.

One incident of fun turned fatal was in Washington State. In December, two adults playing on an inflatable jumper fell on a three-year old boy and he died when his skull was crushed.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that between 1997 and 2004, estimates the number of accidents on bounce houses, inflatable slides, and climbing walls increased nearly four fold to 4,900. Between 2002 and 2005, 4 people died on bounce houses and inflatable slides. The victim's ages were 15 to 24 years old.

### **You Can Ensure Your Bounce House is a Safe and Enjoyable Experience by Following some Simple Rules.**

Before you even commit to an operator you need to ask a few basic questions:

1. Are they insured and will they supply a copy of the insurance certificate?
2. Are they trained/experienced in

inflatable operations?

3. What safety measures do they provide YOU with?

Price should not even be a consideration!

After the operator arrives, they should do the following and it is your job to pay attention to help make sure it's done properly.

1. A tarp should be placed on the ground to protect the bottom of the unit.
2. The unit should be staked down or heavily weighted down with ground weights or sandbags.
3. When the unit is inflated make sure there are no rips or holes visible.
4. Make sure the unit is fully inflated and not sagging anywhere.
5. The operator MUST cover all operating and safety procedures verbally, and should leave printed instructions as well.

It is your responsibility to ask questions if you do not understand.





After the operator leaves, you should always:

1. Attend the unit at all times.
2. Keep children age 3 and under OUT of the unit.
3. Make sure all children are grouped according to SIZE.
4. DO NOT exceed the maximum ride capacity at any time.
5. Perform safety checks of the equipment frequently. Operators will show you how.
6. Turn the unit off during inclement weather or high winds.
7. Seek medical attention for ALL injuries IF they occur.
8. Follow ALL posted safety rules at all times.

These simple tips will help keep you safe and allow you to enjoy the rental of your inflatable. Remember, safety first, safety always! Safety is everyone's job!

### **Below are "Questions to Ask and Things to Consider When Choosing a Bounce House."**

There are a number of factors to consider when choosing a bounce houses rental company for your event that you may not even realize! Here are a few things to ask when you start to comparison shop:

### **Insurance**

The first thing you should find out from a prospective rental company is whether or not they are insured. Bounce House rental insurance covers liability in case of an accident where the bounce house company

is at fault. It does not typically cover injuries or minor accidents that happen while the bounce house is under your supervision. So why should you care?

A company that has made the effort to get insurance has made a commitment to a safe operation. It shows longevity (fly-by-night companies don't bother with the expense of insurance) and a concern both for your safety and the long-term success of their own company.

**In addition to the usual additional insured wording, the certificate should specifically indicate that it is insuring the bounce houses – In a recent case it was found that although a certificate was provided, when presented with a claim, the insurance company showed their policy excluded bounce houses.**

### **Delivery**

Does your prospective rental company offer delivery? Is there an additional charge?

Bounce Houses are heavy, bulky, and awkward to move and setup. They require proper securing, either with stakes or sandbags and there may be state-regulated minimum requirements on the size of the stakes or the weight of the sandbags. If you are picking up

the bounce house yourself, be sure the operator reviews safety and setup instructions with you to ensure that you have a safe and fun experience with your bounce house.

In most areas, you can find companies with delivery included or for a small additional charge. It's not just about the money or convenience, but the safety of your children and their guests. Consider having a professional set up your inflatable bounce house for your own peace of mind.

### **Cleanliness**

Bounce houses get really dirty—they are outside in all types of weather! You will typically find do-it-yourself places or inexpensive operators don't take the time to properly clean and sanitize the bounce, although some do. Ask about their cleaning policies.

Sanitize? Yes, this is important. Bounces are active places full of little people bouncing against the floors, walls, and pillars in hot conditions—often face first and loving it! You want to feel secure that the surfaces they are coming in contact with are clean and germ-free.

Companies that properly clean and sanitize their inflatable units ensure that germs don't spread from one party to the next, not to mention the fact that your party-goers won't go home with black socks!

### **Attended vs. Unattended**

Many companies will have an attendant who will stay for the duration of your party and supervise the bounce house—often it's included in the fee quoted. Be sure to ask about an







attendant if the rental fee seems high for your area—it could be those extra man-hours that drive the price up but as many event-organizers will tell you it's well worth it!

If the company doesn't offer attended rentals or you aren't interested in paying the extra fees, make sure the delivery company reviews operating and safety procedures with you before they leave; things like what to do if it rains or gets windy, what to do if the power goes out, how many kids are allowed at a time, etc. Bounce Houses are fun and safe, but it's best to be prepared in case the weather changes or anything else unexpected happens.

## Deposits

Deposits vary by area. In highly competitive areas, you may not be required to send in a deposit but in most areas of the country rental companies do require a deposit of some sort—a credit card number or a mailed deposit. This ensures the equipment you want is reserved for the date and time you requested.

Find out under what conditions your deposit is refundable. How long do you have to cancel? How are weather cancellations handled? What about refunds or re-scheduling?

While we want to believe your party will go off smoothly, reality is that the weather may not cooperate, or any of a number of things can happen that might cause you to cancel or reschedule. If a deposit is required, make sure you get it in on time or you may lose your reservation!

## Power

Typically, if you rent a bounce house, you are expected to provide an electrical

outlet. Be sure to test outdoor outlets as they are likely to go bad and if you don't use them often, you may not be aware they don't work until time for setup! Plug a hair dryer into the outlet and let it run at high a few minutes to test. If used outdoors electrical outlets should be equipped with a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter or GFCI.

For events that aren't near an electrical source, you'll need a generator. Many rental companies have them or can get them for you—if not you can pick one up yourself at a local rental store. Make sure you know how to operate it and how long a tank of gas will last if you are doing it yourself.

## Setup Area

Inflatables can't be set up on a slope. It's just not safe. You'll need a relatively flat area at least 5' bigger all around than the size of the inflatable. It's best to make sure you have enough room ahead of time by measuring or at least walking off the area so that you don't have to rearrange your plans at the last minute.

Check for bushes or tree branches in the way and make sure there are no power lines or overhanging branches overhead.

Clear the area of rocks, twigs, pinecones, or other obstructions and check for fire ant hills, dog leave-behinds, or anything else that might be in the way.

Do you have an irrigation system? Let your bounce house rental company know that up front. They may choose to secure the unit with sandbags instead of stakes if you are unsure where the irrigation lines are.

## Have Fun

Bounce Houses are impressive, exciting, and fun! Your organization will be the center of attention when the bounce

house is up and running, so enjoy it and get lots of pictures of those little ones having the time of their lives. They'll always remember it and so will you.

- Make sure children are grouped with other children his/her size.
- Don't let a child go in if there are too many children already inside.
- Always keep an eye on the children. Seconds will count if they get injured.
- Remove children if they get tired. A sitting child is more at risk at getting jumped on by another child.
- Be aware of all the bounce house safety rules. Trust your instincts if you believe a child is not ready to join in.
- Make sure someone is ALWAYS supervising the children.
- If a bounce house ever does collapse, be sure to remove all the children immediately.
- Blow-overs and collapses due to equipment failure or improper setup can, and do, cause catastrophic accidents.
- Inadequate supervision increases the danger of broken bones and dislocations. Allowing younger children to jump with older children is the most common safety hazard cited by safety officials.
- Inflatable attractions are exempt from safety oversight in many states. Find out if they are exempt in your state.

**Contact Your Diocese Insurance or Risk Management Department BEFORE You Rent, Purchase or Use an Inflatable Bounce House To Ensure You Follow Established Policies.**