

Protecting Young Children In the Home

Children are a pride and joy for most parents, but along with the joys come worries...especially about safety. While parents worry about their children's safety when they are away from home, they often overlook safety concerns in their own home. A home may feel safe and secure, but it can also be full of hidden hazards that could seriously injure or even kill a child.

In 1994, almost 2 million children under age 5 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries that occurred in and around the home. Accidents or “preventable injuries” that take place in and around the home are the leading killers of children. They account for 10,000 lives each year. In fact, accidents have killed more children between the ages of 1 and 14 than the five leading fatal diseases combined.

Most, if not all, childhood injury deaths and disabilities are preventable. Most home accidents occur because of childhood curiosity and unsafe environments. You should provide a safe, hazard free environment for your children. The simple childproofing done when the child is an infant may not be enough to keep that child safe throughout the childhood years.

At each stage in your child's life, look for possible hazards in your home and think about ways to eliminate them. When there is more than one child in your family, be aware that products and situations that are not hazardous to an older child may be hazardous to your younger child. Fortunately, children are born with limited mobility so there is time for you to prepare a safe home for the family.

Accidental injuries are made up of three important ingredients:

- A dangerous object (i.e. a boiling pot on the stove);
- Someone vulnerable (a toddler); and
- The circumstances of the environment (the pot handles are turned outward so the toddler can reach them).

To see what sorts of dangerous things may be lurking in your house, try to view each room from your child's vantage point. If your child is an infant, lie on the floor and look all around the room. What looks interesting under furniture? What is at your child's eye level? What can your child reach if he or she pulls up? This may help you better understand dangers that may look attractive to your child.

The second part of the equation — someone vulnerable — will change over time. As your child grows from an infant, to a toddler, to a young child, and beyond, you will constantly have to reevaluate your home. Having children of various ages requires a greater level of safety precautions. Not only do children need protection from safety hazards they may encounter, but also they will need protec-

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tion from those that the older or younger child may cause. To help keep up with the possible dangers, the American Academy of Pediatrics suggest that you review the child's developmental capabilities in relationship to his or her living environment by regularly asking: "How far can he move? How high can he reach? What objects attract his attention? What can he do today that he couldn't do yesterday? What will he do tomorrow that he can't do today?"

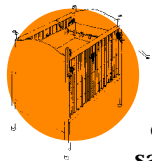
The third part of the accidental injury equation is the environment. This is one area that you can control and monitor. Eliminating the hazardous conditions in the areas where children live and play can be greatly reduced if not completely eliminate accidents.

To help determine the kinds of hazard that might be in the home environment, it is helpful to review a child's developmental stages in terms of household hazards.

Children under 6 months

Since these children have limited mobility and ability, it is relatively easy to control their environment and keep it safe. However, infants do gain new skills quickly and you must always be alert to the potential dangers as they learn to roll over and sit up.

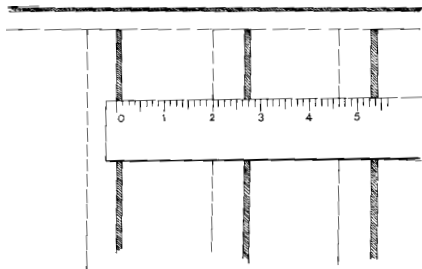
Dangers: strangulation, suffocation, burns, falls, drowning



For safety's sake:

The crib should be a safe haven. If your crib was manufactured before 1976, check to be sure it complies with present safety guidelines from the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- No missing, broken loose, or poorly installed screws, brackets, or other hardware on the crib or the mattress support.
- A firm, snug-fitting mattress to prevent baby from being trapped between the mattress and the side of the crib.



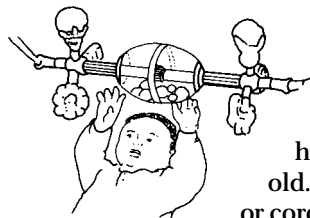
- No more than 2 3/8 inches (about four fingers wide) between the slats to keep a baby's body from fitting through them.

- No corner posts over 1/16 inch above the end panel (with the exception of canopy-style cribs) to prevent clothing from getting caught.

- No cut-out areas on end panels which can entrap a baby's head. (CPSC standard since 1982).
- A mattress support that doesn't pull apart easily, to prevent entrapment between the mattress and the crib.
- No cracked or peeling paint, which may be a lead hazard.
- No splinters or rough edges.

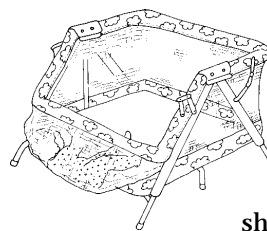
In addition, periodically check side rail slats to be sure that they are secure. Loose glue joints should be repaired so they do not fall out and leave space for the child's head to get caught.

- Do not use soft bedding materials, such as pillows and comforters, sheepskins, quilts, and toys in the crib.
- Make sure that infant sleepwear is flame-retardant. Follow manufacturer's instructions on the label when washing. The label may recommend not using chlorine bleach or fabric softener since they can reduce the flame-retardant protection.



- Crib toys strung across the crib or playpen should be removed when a child begins to push up on his or her hands or knees or is 5 months old. Even toys with long strings or cords can wrap around an infant or young child's neck causing strangulation.

- Infant changing tables should have guardrails on the side and a safety strap for securing the infant in place. Even with safety straps, never leave a child unattended on a changing table. Ideally, the middle of the changing table should be lower than the sides.



- Never place an infant in a mesh playpen or portable crib with a side down. The mesh can form a loose pocket into which an infant can roll and thus suffocate.

- Infant changing tables should have guardrails on the side and a safety strap for securing the infant in place. Even with safety straps, never leave a child unattended on a changing table. Ideally, the middle of the changing table should be lower than the sides.
- Never leave a baby unattended in the bathtub — even in a bathing ring or infant tub. Children have drowned in 2 inches of water in the time it takes to answer the telephone.

- If bathing an infant in a large tub, put a small towel or cloth on the bottom of the tub to prevent slipping.
- Before bathing an infant, test the temperature of the water with the elbow or the inside part of the arm or wrist.
- Install a scald guard to bathtub plumbing to help prevent burns or set the hot water heater at a maximum of 120°F.
- Do not tie pacifiers or other items around a child's neck as they can cause strangulation.
- Never attach a pacifier to the crib, carriage, playpen, or stroller or the child's wrist with a ribbon, string, or cord of any kind.
- Never use plastic coverings or garbage bags as crib mattress covers or pillow covers as they can cling to a child's face and cause suffocation.
- Install at least one smoke detector on the wall or ceiling on each level of your home. Ideally, it should be located near the bedrooms. Change the batteries at least once a year.

6 to 12 months

During this time in development, children begin creeping, crawling, and even walking. Sitting and standing alone are also new abilities. Children of this age also spend a great deal of time reaching and grabbing for things. They also learn about the world not only by sight and touch, but also by taste. Almost everything a child touches at this age will go directly into his or her mouth.

Dangers: Strangulation, suffocation, drowning, electrical shock, burns, falls

For safety's sake:

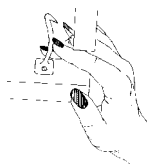
- Continue to follow all safety precautions mentioned previously.
- Remove all crib gyms and mobiles.
- Lower the crib mattress to the lowest level by the time the child learns to stand so that the child cannot fall out by climbing up and over the rail or by leaning against it.
- Remove crib bumpers by the time the child can pull up to a standing position.
- Never leave a child alone in a high chair, swing, or other baby equipment, even with a safety strap.
- Never place the crib near window covering pull cords as the child may become entangled in them.
- Be aware of the cleaning bucket. A young child may try to use it to pull up. Always empty cleaning

buckets after using as young children have been known to drown after falling into buckets with only 2 inches of water.

- Use child safety gates now and into the toddler years to keep children away from stairs. Never allow a child to climb stairs alone until he or she can safely negotiate steps. This usually occurs around the age of 2, but it may be later for some children.
- Do not place electric fans, heaters, and vaporizers on the floor where a baby can get to them.
- Never tie toys to a playpen. A child can strangle if he or she gets caught on them.
- Keep sharp objects, buttons, beads, pens, tacks and scissors out of reach.
- Don't let your child crawl around in the kitchen when you are cooking or serving meals.
- Do not place high chairs and playpens near the stove or counter.
- Keep hot foods and liquids, and cords from irons, toasters, coffee pots and other small appliances out of the child's reach.
- Dispose of empty hazardous cleaner containers in the trash outside the house so a child cannot get them out of the trash and play with them.



- Never keep household cleaners and chemicals under the sink where your crawling child can get to them.
- Do not transfer hazardous products into food containers, such as jars, soft drink or juice bottles.



- Use child-proof locking devices on cabinets to keep children out.
- Do not transfer hazardous products into food containers, such as jars, soft drink or juice bottles.
- Do not store hazardous products near food.
- Do not leave infants 12 months or younger on adult beds with a regular mattress or a waterbed mattress. The infant can become trapped between the mattress and frame or wall.
- An infant can also suffocate if he or she becomes wedged against an adult and the mattress and when the mattress is placed on top of a waterbed mattress.
- Keep young children out of the bathroom unless supervised. Children have drowned in bathtubs, sink basins, and toilet bowls.

- Never use a radio, TV, heater, or any other electrical appliance near a tub, sink, or pool. Electric rollers and hair dryers should be disconnected when not in use to prevent electrical shock.
- Never put detergent or knives in the dish washer without closing and locking it.
- If a crib is placed against the wall, any wall decoration, ribbons, or streamers should be out of reach to prevent entanglement or strangulation.
- Plastic bags from dry cleaners, produce, or grocery store should be destroyed or stored on a high shelf if they are to be recycled. Store trash bags out of reach. This will keep a small child from playing with them.
- Never leave a child alone with a sibling under 5. A game of peek-a-boo can end in suffocation or a hug in cracked ribs.
- Never leave a child unattended with a pet.

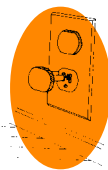
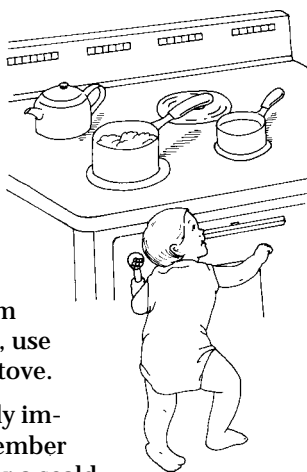
The Toddler Years (ages 1-3)

Children of this age enjoy running, climbing, mimicking parents, and getting into and out of things. While their physical abilities are increasing rapidly, their ability to understand the consequences of their actions is still limited. Children of this age are very mobile and they like to explore their world.

Dangers: Burns, electrical shock, drowning, falls, poisonings, strangulation

For safety's sake:

- Keep young children away from appliances such as irons, heaters, and toasters to prevent the burns.
- Turn handles on pots and pans away from the front of the stove so that young children cannot reach them and pull them over. Whenever possible, use the back burner on the stove.
- A scald guard is especially important at this age. Remember it only takes 2 seconds for a scald to occur if the water is 140°F.
- If a window must be open where a small child is sleeping or playing, open double hung windows from the top or only open others 2 inches or less.



- Use safty plugs in all electrical outlets. Children should not be allowed to plug in appliances or to turn appliances off and on.
- Store matches and lighters out of reach.
- Never leave a small child alone, even for a minute.
- A screen over an open window will keep out bugs but will not be strong enough to keep an infant inside.
- Install locks to prevent sliding windows from opening wide enough for a child to fall out.
- Keep furniture away from open windows as a child may climb on the furniture to reach the window.
- Children should not be allowed to climb ladders. A ladder should never be left where a child is playing.
- Children 1 to 3 years old find themselves in serious trouble by climbing on things. An anti-tip device installed on the stove will prevent it from toppling when a child climbs on it. Children have been killed when crushed by kitchen stoves.
- Keep all exterior doors locked so that a child cannot go outside without your knowing it.
- Never leave anything unsafe or heavy on the kitchen counter or a table if a child could possibly reach it.
- Do not use a toy chest that does not have lid support to hold the lid open in any position. Before buying, check to be sure the support works properly.
- Make sure a toy box or toy chest has ventilation holes. If a child climbs in to hide, he or she will be able to get air. Make sure that the ventilation holes are not locked if the chest is placed against the wall.
- Young children may also climb on bookcases, shelves, chests of drawers, TV carts, stands, or tables. Any of these pieces of furniture can tip over on a child. Angle braces or anchors attached to the furniture and to the wall in a child's room can prevent tipping. The anchors should be screwed to the wall studs. Televisions should be place on low furniture to prevent accidents.
- Do not use tablecloths on lamp tables or dining tables as infants and toddlers can pull them off causing heavy objects to fall or hot liquids to spill.

Children ages 1 to 2 are more likely to die from poisonings than children in any other age group. To prevent poisonings:

- Keep vitamins or mineral supplements that contain iron in child-resistant containers. Iron medications contain ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate, or ferrous fumarate, which are extremely hazardous to young

children. Only a few pills can kill a child. Poison Control Centers report that iron supplements are responsible for 30 percent of the child poisoning deaths from medications.

- Avoid taking medications in front of children.
- Two tablespoons of Pine Sol or Drano can kill a small child. Remember young children will eat and drink almost anything, so keep all hazardous products out of reach. Store household cleaning products in high locked cabinets away from children, rather than under the kitchen sink.
- Never refer to medicine as “candy.”
- Keep all medications in containers with child-resistant closures.
- Never transfer hazardous household products or medicines to a bottle without a child-resistant closure.
- Be sure to re-close the child-resistant closure. Don’t let any inconvenience in opening the product deter closing it.
- Do not allow a child to play with a closed container of hazardous household products or medications. A child-resistant closure is not necessarily child proof.
- Remember, toddlers will put anything in their mouths. Protect children from choking by keeping small items, such as coins, marbles, safety pins, and tacks, out reach.
- If an object can fit through a toilet paper roll, it can choke a child.
- Children under 3 should not play with balloons. If they bite them or put the balloon in their mouths, they can choke or suffocate if the balloon pieces become lodged in the throat.
- Keep common items like coins, pins, buttons, or small batteries away from children. Swallowing them can choke a child.
- Remember plants in the home, yard, and the garden may contain harmful chemicals.
- Properly dispose of pruning clippings to keep them away from children.
- Avoid using houseplants like philodendron and dieffenbachia. Choose houseplants from the “safe” list in this publication.
- Beware of cut flowers. While they are not poisonous, they can get lodged in a child’s throat.
- Do not pick any wild mushrooms. There are no “rules of thumb” to adequately identify safe varieties from poisonous varieties.
- Remove wild mushrooms from the yard as soon as they appear, which usually is after rainy spells in the fall and spring.
- Remember, even plants like tomatoes and potatoes can have toxic parts.
- Use safety latches on cabinets and drawers where medicines, drugs, or hazardous household products are stored.

The Young Child (ages 3-5)

Children of this age have much improved physical coordination. They also have a great desire to do things independently of parents or caregivers. Coupled with this independence is an active imagination. The combination of skills, independence and fantasy can be dangerous, because although they can practice some self-control, their physical abilities are still ahead of their judgement.

Dangers: burns, electrical shock, drowning, falls, poisoning

For safety sake:

- Do not allow your child to play with matches or lighters. Store them out of reach.
- Never leave a child unattended near fire places, grills, or any type of open flame.
- Supervise your child when he or she is around any body of water. Backyard pools, hot tubs, wading pools, creeks, ponds, and streams can be very dangerous.
- Empty wading pools when not in use.
- Use a locked fence, at least 4 feet high, around a backyard pool.
- Replace any garage door opener that does not have an automatic reverse feature, or disconnect the garage door opener and operate the garage door manually. Or relocate the wall switch, placing it as high as practical to prevent a child from operating the door.
- If sliding glass doors are regular plate glass instead of tempered glass, add a film to it that will help contain broken pieces.
- Add decorative decals to sliding glass doors so that children can see when the door is closed.
- Parents should warn young children not to take out batteries or install them. Parents, not children, should install batteries.

Children must be 4 years or older to sleep on a bunk bed:

Tall Plants	Medium-Height Plants	Small Plants	Hanging Plants
Norfolk Island Pine	Aspidistra	Hens-and-chick (Echeveroa)	Maidenhair fern
Ponytail Palm (Beaucarnea recurvata)	Bird's nest fern	Fittonia Verschaffeltii	Asparagus fern
Parlor Palm	Bromeliads, almost all type	Peperomia	Spider plant (Chlorophytum comosum)
Areca Palm (Chrysalidocarpus lutescens)	Jade plant (Crassula argetea)	Staghorn fern (Platycerium bifurcatum)	Grape ivy
False aralia	Polka-Dot plant (Hypoestes phyllostachya)	Christmas and Thanksgiving catuses	Goldfish plant
Fatsia japonica	Sensitive plant (Mimosa pudica)		Rabbit's foot fern
Ficus Benjamina	Lady Palm (Rhapis excelsa)		Boston fern
Rubber plant (Ficus elastica)	Yucca species		But ton fern
			Trailing watermelon begonia
			Burro's tail (Sedum morganianum)
			Piggyback plant
			Swedish ivy
			Wandering Jew

Sources: "Baby-safe Houseplants & Cut Flowers" by John I. Albert & Delores M. Alber

- When buying bunk beds, check all eight mattress support fin tabs and pockets for cracks in the metal or welds as they can cause the bed to collapse. Check the guardrail spacing on bunk beds. The space between the guardrail and the mattress should be small enough to prevent a child's head from becoming trapped between them.

Summary

Your home should be a safe haven for a child, allowing him or her to grow and development mentally, physically, and psychologically. As a parent you can keep your child safe by being aware of his changing physical capabilities, adapting the home environment, and taking measures to ensure safety. Lastly, teach your child safe practices to follow.

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