

Positive Parenting

Home Safety

As infants spend most of their time at home, the home environment needs to be as safe as possible. This is particularly important from around six to eight months of age when infants start moving around. Having a safe environment allows children to explore their surroundings. Parenting is easier when you do not have to constantly tell children not to touch things. Accidents in the home are a leading cause of injury and death in young children. By recognising and removing some of the dangers in the home, most accidents can be prevented. This tip sheet gives some suggestions about how to make your home safe for your child.

Why Is Safety Important?

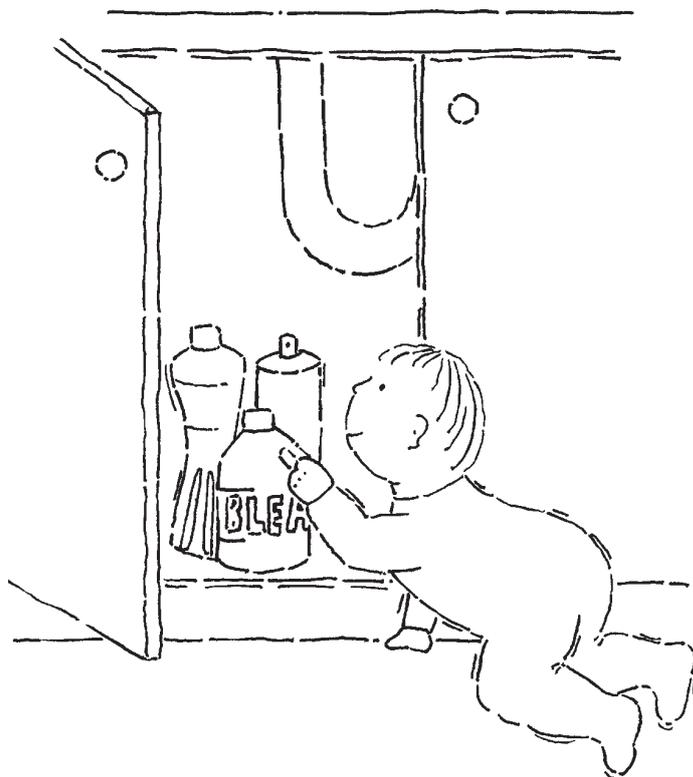
Each year there are about 1.6 million accidents involving children in Australia. Each day, 5,000 children need medical attention due to accidents, and 170 of these are admitted to hospital. One child loses their life every day as a result of accidents. Half of these accidents occur at home. Most accidents at home occur inside the house and involve children under the age of five. Boys are more likely to be injured than girls. The major causes of injury are falls, poisoning, burns and scalds, and bites. The major causes of death include drowning, house fires, suffocation, choking and poisoning.

How To Make Your Home Safe

Kitchen and Living Areas

Many accidents occur in the kitchen, so anything that may cause harm should be well out of reach of young children. This may include sharp objects or utensils, matches or lighters, glassware or breakables, and poisons such as household cleaners, bleaches, chemicals or medicines. Make sure these items are removed to high or lockable cupboards and dispose of any poisons or medicines that are not in use. Check that potentially harmful objects are removed from low areas, especially those below one metre. Empty the dishwasher when your child is not there. Left over dishwashing powder causes burns and poisoning if swallowed. Make sure that the dishwasher door is kept firmly closed at all times.

Power points, electrical plugs and cords can be a particular problem for infants and toddlers. When power points are not in use, make sure they are covered with safety covers



that fit into the socket. These are available from hardware and department stores. If possible, have an electrician install a circuit breaker or safety switches to avoid electrocution. Check that all cords are well insulated and not in need of repair. Keep a fire extinguisher and fire blanket somewhere that is easily accessible. All heaters and fires should have sturdy guards placed well in front of them.

So your child cannot accidentally pull an appliance down on top of them, keep all appliance cords, especially for the electric jug, well out of reach. If possible, use curly cords or a cordless jug. Turn pot handles toward the rear of the stove and use back plates as much as possible. Use a stove guard to prevent your child from being able to touch hot elements or tip pots off the stove. Consider using a barrier so young children are unable to enter the kitchen while you are cooking. Never leave your child unattended in the kitchen. Never carry hot items over your child's head. It is better to bring your plates to the pots rather than carry pots or saucepans across the kitchen.

Place hot drinks at the back of workbenches or in the centre of the table to avoid accidental spills and burns. Do not have hot drinks while nursing a child. Use non-slip placemats rather than table cloths which can be easily pulled off the table.

To prevent accidental suffocation, keep plastic bags out of reach, and tie a knot in them if they are to be recycled or thrown out so a young child will not be able to get a bag over their head.

Keep children away from unstable or fragile furniture until they do not need to grab onto things to keep upright. Attach safety corners to sharp edges on furniture in case there are falls. Make sure that TV or stereo knobs cannot be removed and swallowed. Preferably, valuable video and stereo equipment should be kept in a locked cupboard. Objects less than three or four centimetres wide (buttons, coins, small batteries, needles, pins, small pieces of toys), and hard foods (nuts and raw carrot pieces) can be accidentally swallowed by infants. To prevent choking, keep these items out of reach, and cook or grate hard foods for young children. Ensure that pot plants are not poisonous. Ideally, pot plants should also be out of young children's reach.

Nursery furniture and equipment should comply with Australian standards where they apply. Check for an approval stamp.

Bathrooms

Water fascinates children. From the age of about eight months, many children try to pull themselves into the bath or, occasionally, up on to the sink to turn on taps or to get to the medicine cupboard. This can result in serious accidents such as falling into the bath, getting scalded, drowning or taking dangerous medicines.

Never leave an infant or toddler unattended in the bath or bathroom. Children can drown in just five centimetres of water. Take the telephone off the hook when you are bathing your child, and take your child with you if you must leave the bathroom for any reason. It is best to fill the bath with cold water first, then add hot, then turn on the cold tap briefly so the spout cools down. Always check to make sure the bath is the correct temperature before putting your child in. Bath water should be 38°C or less. Turn off all taps tightly so your child can't turn them on, and fit child-resistant safety taps on all hot water taps. To prevent scalding, have your hot water turned down to no more than 50°C.

Try to use non-slip floor finishings and keep the floor dry. Keep all electrical appliances such as razors and hair dryers unplugged and out of reach.

Keep all cleaning agents, cosmetics and medicines locked up. Keep the bathroom door closed firmly so babies and toddlers are only in the bathroom if they are supervised.

Stairs

From nine or 10 months of age, children are intrigued by stairs and want to climb them. Falling down stairs can cause serious injuries, including head and spinal injuries.

Fit safety gates at the top and bottom of staircases and make sure they are kept closed. Make sure you are with your child whenever they attempt to go up or down stairs.

Doorways

Where possible, keep doors propped open with doorstops, wedges or latches, or use finger jam protectors on doors to prevent injuries to your child's fingers. This is especially important in living areas and children's bedrooms.

Dangerous Toys

Always follow the manufacturer's age recommendations on toys. Some toys are unsafe for young children. When you purchase toys appropriate for your older child, think about the dangers for younger children. Marbles, Lego, small cars, and toys with small, removable parts can be put into an infant's or toddler's mouth and cause choking. Any object smaller than three or four centimetres wide can be dangerous. Problems can arise when older children play with these kinds of toys and they attract the attention of younger ones. Older children should be encouraged to play with such toys in their bedrooms, outside the house, or only if the younger child is closely supervised by an adult. Older children should be warned of the potential danger of the toy to their younger brother or sister.

How To Make the Outside of Your Home Safe

Pools

Swimming pools should be fenced by an Australian standard isolation fence with a child-resistant gate. Fencing and gates should be appropriately maintained, and gates should be kept closed at all times. Swimming activities need to be supervised. Parents should insist that older children walk rather than run when near the pool. Young children should always wear flotation aids and be taught to swim as soon as possible. Show children where it is safe to dive. Too many head injuries, even in good swimmers, are caused by children misjudging the dive and hitting the bottom. When several children are in the pool, diving should be banned altogether. Lock away pool chemicals and pool filtration equipment.

Play Equipment

Outdoor play equipment should be kept in good condition and checked regularly for sharp edges and splintered wood. Young children should always be supervised near swings and slides. Infants and toddlers can easily crawl or walk into the path of older children on swings and get hurt. Try to ensure there is a soft surface, such as chip bark, under play equipment to cushion falls.

Barbecue Areas

Barbecues are extremely dangerous places for young children. Children are fascinated by fire and will often try to touch an open flame. Never leave an open fire unattended and keep young children well away from the

cooking area. Gas barbecues should have knobs firmly tightened when not in use. Do not allow children to play with matches at any time. Store matches out of reach or lock them away.

Pets

If you have a dog, always supervise your child when they are near it. Teach your child to approach dogs with caution. Encourage them to avoid strange dogs completely. Keep your child away from the dog at feeding times or if there are puppies. Use a barrier to keep your child away from your pet's feeding area. If possible, wait until your child is of school age before getting a dog. Other pets can also cause difficulties. Cats, rabbits, birds and guinea pigs can all cause scratches. Teach your child how to handle and be gentle with pets. Treat any scratches with antiseptic and consult your doctor if the injury is serious.

Sun Safety

Sunburn can cause serious injury to infants. Do not expose infants under 12 months of age to direct sunlight. Always ensure your child has adequate protection from the sun. They should wear appropriate clothing, such as a long-sleeved T-shirt and a wide-brimmed or legionnaire's style hat. They should also wear SPF 15+ water-resistant sunscreen. Try to ensure that play areas are shaded and avoid staying out in the sun, especially between 10.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. (or 11.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. during daylight saving).

How To Do a Safety Check of Your Home

Check Each Room

A room-by-room safety check, based on one developed by Kidsafe, the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia, is given on the back of this tip sheet. If you answer no to any of these questions, you may need to make some changes.

Make the Changes You Need To Ensure Your Child's Safety

Start by making simple low or no cost changes to areas where your child spends most of their time, such as family living areas. It costs nothing to change your habits. Make some plans for dealing with hazards that involve any expense. It is a good idea to do a first-aid course, and start putting together a first-aid kit. Contact St John Ambulance or the Australian Red Cross to find out about courses in

your area. Develop a fire drill for your home. Adults and older children should be aware of the best exit points and a meeting place outside the house.

Make a List of Emergency Numbers

Have a list of telephone numbers to use in an emergency. Fill out the list below and keep it displayed near your telephone.

Emergency Numbers

Family doctor: _____

Nearest hospital: _____

Neighbour with a car: _____

Ambulance: 000

Fire Brigade: 000

Police: 000

Poisons Information: 13 11 26

Other Useful Numbers

Local Maternal and Child Health Centre:

Maternal and Child Health After Hours Telephone Service
(03) 9853 0844 (for city callers) or 1800 134 883 (for country callers)

Kidsafe: (03) 9670 1319

Child Safety Centre, Royal Children's Hospital (for safety equipment): (03) 9345 5085

Royal Children's Hospital (for clinic appointments, patient inquiries): (03) 9345 5522

Key Steps

- Ensure that your child is supervised at all times.
- Check that each room is safe.
- Check that outside areas are safe.
- Make any necessary changes to make your home safe.
- Keep a list of emergency numbers near your phone.

Further information about safety and accident prevention is available from Kidsafe, the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia (03) 9670 1319. If you have any questions or are concerned about the safety of your home, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.

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Home Safety Checklist

Kitchen

Yes No

- Do I have a fire blanket or a woollen blanket handy?
- Are poisons, cleaners and dish washing liquid kept in a lockable cupboard?
- Is the stove firmly fixed to the wall or floor so it will not tip?
- Are curtains well away from the stove?
- Are knives and matches out of reach?
- Do power points have covers?
- Is the kettle out of reach?
- Is the high chair stable?
- Does the high chair have a harness?
- Is the dishwasher door kept firmly closed?
- Other things I have noticed:
-
-

Bedrooms

Yes No

- Do I have a smoke detector?
- Are pills kept out of reach?
- Is my handbag kept out of reach?
- Is my child's cot away from the window?
- Are curtain cords away from the cot?
- Are the cot rails 50 to 85 millimetres apart?
- Is everything I need close to the changing table?
- Do bunks have strong rails?
- Are the toys in good condition?
- Are sharp corners on the furniture protected?
- Is the furniture arranged to avoid collisions?
- Is there a night light?
- Other things I have noticed:
-
-

Living Rooms

Yes No

- Do I have a smoke detector?
- Does the heating, such as the fire place or heater, have a strong guard?
- Do power points have covers?
- Are the electrical leads short?
- Are sharp corners on the furniture protected?
- Is the furniture arranged to avoid collisions?
- Are hot drinks placed out of reach?
- Do glass doors or large windows have safety film?
- Do I use table mats rather than cloths?
- Other things I have noticed:
-
-

Bathroom and Laundry

Yes No

- Is the hot water temperature turned down low (50°C)?
- Do I have child-resistant taps?
- Are poisons stored out of reach?
- Do I have a lockable medicine cupboard?
- Are razors, scissors and hair dryers stored out of reach?
- Are cosmetics and toiletries stored out of reach?
- Does my nappy bucket have a firm lid?
- Is my nappy bucket placed out of reach?
- Are electric heaters away from water?
- Are electric heaters placed out of reach?
- Other things I have noticed:
-
-

Outside

Yes No

- Does the shed or garage have a lock?
- Are there fences and self-closing gates around all drowning hazards (including pools, ponds and bird baths)?
- Is water emptied out of buckets and bins?
- Is the play area separate from the driveway, dams and other hazards?
- Is the play area fenced?
- Is the play equipment stable and in good condition?
- Is there a soft surface under play equipment to cushion falls?
- Are pathways clear?
- Are all poisonous plants removed?
- Are branches trimmed away from children's eye level?
- Are garden tools put away after use?
- Other things I have noticed:
-
-