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FS#FCS6182

## Home Safety: Inside and Out

Over 3.5 million children are injured in or around the home each year seriously enough to require emergency care, with just over 2,200 of the injuries proving fatal. The most common causes of injury and death in the home for children are fires and burns, falls, poisonings, chokings, suffocation, electrocution, drowning and the unintentional use of guns. By taking time to go through your home and identify possible sources of danger and taking the steps to make them safe, you can reduce the chance of your child being injured or worse. The following room-by-room guide provides tips to help child-proof your whole home.



### The Kitchen

- Keep electrical appliances, dishes, and other unsafe objects or items out of the reach of children. Items such as cleansers, vitamins, medicines and alcoholic beverages should be kept up high and locked away. Knives and other less obvious items such as plastic bags and plastic wrap, which could pose suffocation hazards, should also be kept up high and out of the reach of children.
- Store safe snack items at a height where children can easily reach them without needing to climb or reach over a hot area.
- Keep trash in a closed cabinet or pantry with a lock when young children are present.
- When cooking, turn pot handles towards the back of the stove and use back burners when possible. If possible, choose a stove with control knobs on the back rather than the front. Also, teach children to never touch the stove.
- Mop up spills quickly to keep your child (and others) from slipping.
- Avoid the use of tablecloths, as young children can pull them and the contents on them off.

### Bathrooms

- Keep toilet lids closed, and use a safety lock for younger children.

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- Avoid the use of automatic toilet bowl cleansers, as they attract children to the water.
- Keep all electrical appliances unplugged and away from sinks or tubs.
- Store dangerous items, including razors, scissors, cleansers, medicines, shampoo and conditioner, mouthwash, and the like out of the reach of children. Medicines should have child-resistant caps and should be stored in their original containers.
- Use tub spout covers on tub faucets and rubber mats or stickers on the bottom of the tub. Always test bath water before putting a child in, and NEVER leave a child unattended in the tub. Also, be sure to completely drain the tub when finished bathing.

### **The Living Room**

- Secure bookshelves and other unstable large furniture pieces to the wall so that children cannot pull them over.
- If you have plants, keep them out of the reach of children. When choosing plants, look for those that are non-toxic.
- Keep dangerous items, knickknacks, nuts, and candy out of the reach of children.
- Put televisions on low, sturdy furniture or up high, out of the reach of children.
- Put corner guards on tables and other furniture pieces that have sharp corners. Check knobs for tightness, and tighten or remove if loose. If you have a glass-top table, keep children away from it while playing, or put it away until children are older.
- If you have a recliner, do not allow children to sit in it without an adult. Fingers could get pinched and a child's head can get trapped between the seat and leg rest.

### **Bedrooms/Nursery**

- Keep medicines, perfumes, coins, jewelry and other dangerous items out of the reach of children.
- Keep all firearms out of the reach of children and secured in a locked box made for gun storage. Remove all ammunition from firearms before storing, and store in a separate place from the gun.

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- If using bunk beds, use a guard rail on the top bed until your child is accustomed to sleeping in it. Children under 6 years should only sleep on the bottom bunk.
- Teach older children to keep their rooms clean, and to keep toys and games with small pieces out of the reach of younger siblings.
- Use only toy chests that have a spring-loaded lid that will stay open in any position. If you have an older toy chest, install a support device for the lid, or remove it completely.
- Make sure your crib meets current safety standards and that all pieces are securely attached and in good working condition. Keep cribs away from drapery blinds and wall hangings. Crib mobiles should be securely fastened, should have no strings longer than 12 inches, and should be removed when your child can push up on hands and knees. Once your child can climb or fall over the sides of the crib, he should be moved to a bed.
- Mount lamps on the wall or place them where the plug cannot be reached.

### Laundry Room

- Store detergents, bleaches and other cleaning agents up and out of the reach of children. Keep all items in their original containers with labels intact.
- Keep irons unplugged and out of reach when not in use. When in use, keep children away, and keep the cord out of reach. Take down ironing board as soon as ironing is completed, and place hot iron in an area where children cannot pull it down on them.
- Keep items children could use for climbing, such as chairs, ladders, buckets, etc., out of the laundry area to prevent them from climbing into the washing machine, and teach a child never to play in the dryer.



### Windows and Doors

- Place stickers or marking strips on glass doors to keep children from walking into them, and keep all doors and windows leading to the outside closed and locked.
- Consider placing alarms on doors and windows, especially if you have a pool.
- Keep furniture away from windows to prevent children from having access to them, and place window guards on all windows above the ground floor, making sure they have an emergency release device in case of fire.

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### Whole House

- Install UL labeled smoke detectors on ceilings outside of bedrooms and on every floor of the house, test them monthly to make sure they are working, and change the batteries twice a year. Also make sure you have a working fire extinguisher in the home.
- Install a UL labeled carbon monoxide alarm on the wall outside of all sleeping areas.
- Put baby safety gates at the top and bottom of all stairs to prevent falls.
- Keep phone, window blind, and other cords out of the reach of children.
- Use non-skid backing on rugs to prevent slipping.
- Keep purses, diaper bags and other bags up and out of the reach of children.
- Install ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) in outlets near water.



Once you have child-proofed the inside of your home, you will want to move to the outdoors to perform a safety audit. While our yards and other areas around the home can be great places to play, they can also pose dangers. Be sure to check monthly for any new dangers or trouble spots. To keep your child and all family members safe, consider the following.

Take a walk through your home, garage and any sheds/workshops to identify hazardous situations such as tools, equipment, or dangerous liquids which are being stored in an unsafe manner. Take the necessary steps to store these items in a manner that is safe for children:

- Secure and anchor items that may lean against a wall to the wall or other surface to avoid having them fall on someone. Once secured, check to make sure they are firmly in place, and remember to put them back.
- For machinery or equipment that requires a key to operate, keep the key stored in a separate location away from equipment it is to be used with.
- Keep all power tools out of the reach of children, in a locked location if possible.

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- Store all pesticides and other harmful products out of the reach of children and keep in original, labeled containers.
- Think about how children see different items and how they might use them. For example, stacked logs may be viewed as a mountain to climb.
- Keep children away from work areas, even when not in use. Once again, teach children the dangers involved in those areas.



Include your child in the safety audit. It is important that you talk to your child about why certain things are not to be played with and the dangers involved in them. When children understand the “why” of things, they are more likely to stay away. Also, remember that children are smaller and lower to the ground, and therefore have a different view point than an adult. Be sure to look low, getting down on hands and knees if necessary, in order to spot potential safety concerns that may not be immediately identified at a higher level.

Finally, think about any past situations that ended in close calls, or of potential future situations that might lead to injury. Look at what pieces were or could be involved and take steps to eliminate the source of the problem.

By taking time to do a thorough check of your home, both inside and out, you can keep your family safe and reduce injuries. Once any identified problems are corrected, take steps to keep them in proper order. Remember, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound cure.”

### References

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