

Safety for young children



Childhood injuries are not usually 'accidents' and most of them can be prevented. Injuries to young children often happen at home because this is where they spend most of their time.

The best way to keep children safe is to supervise them well. It is also important to make sure your home, yard and other environments are safe.

Children and danger

Young children do not understand danger. Teaching them about danger is important, but it is not enough to keep them safe. In a risky situation they can't think ahead about what might happen or what to do. Adult supervision is always best.

It can help to:

- discuss safety with people who look after your children - grandparents, carers, baby sitters
- keep emergency phone numbers where everyone can find them
- do a children's first aid course
- keep a first aid kit in the house and car.

Agree as a family what you will do and say about safety – it is important children get consistent messages.

Teaching about safety

Teach children about safety from an early age. From about two years, most children should start to follow safety rules but don't rely on them to act safely all the time.

It helps children learn about safety when you:

- model safe behaviours. Children will copy what you do rather than do what you say

- talk with them about what you are doing and why, in ways they will understand. Repeat safety rules often and consistently
- teach them how to keep themselves safe as they get older
- give them the chance to safely explore, take risks and have fun. They will gain new skills and confidence in their abilities.

Remember, being hurt or injured does not teach a young child not to do the same thing again. They haven't as yet learned about 'cause and effect'.

Keeping children safe

Falls

Falls are the major cause of toddler injury.

- Don't leave young children alone on beds, couches, change tables, high chairs or playground equipment.
- Use the harness in the high chair and pusher.
- Teach your toddler how to climb down from beds and chairs at the same time they are learning to climb up.
- Teach children how high they can go if there is a tree they like to climb, and how to get down safely. Let them know they can only climb when an adult is present.
- Don't have bunk beds when there are toddlers living in the house.
- Use barrier gates or lock doors to stop your child going into dangerous places, e.g. stairs.
- Make sure raised heavy items such as televisions and furniture can't fall or be pulled over.
- Pad sharp corners on furniture.

Traffic safety

- Make fences and gates child-proof so young children can't get near traffic.
- Hold on to young children near roads. They may be able to repeat rules about crossing roads but they don't really understand, no matter how many times you tell them.

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Avoid drive-way accidents by always putting your child in the car when moving it.

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Car safety

- The law says that babies, toddlers and children must have properly fitted and approved child restraints or child safety seats (1). Always use a child restraint that is suitable for the child's age, size and weight on every trip
- Always stop the car when you need to turn around to attend to your child in the back seat. It is easy to get distracted and have an accident.
- Make sure there is nothing loose on the dashboard, parcel shelf or floor. Even a box of tissues can cause harm in an accident.
- Never leave babies and children alone in cars because they can:
 - get bored and explore the car's knobs and buttons which can lead to dangers
 - become distressed or try to struggle free from seatbelts and get injured
 - be in danger of someone trying to steal the car with them in it
 - become seriously ill when temperatures in cars increase quickly. This can happen in both summer and winter.

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Never put anything heavy in the back of a hatchback or station wagon unless it is safely secured.

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Burns and scalds

- Never have hot drinks such as tea and coffee while holding your child.
- Keep hot things well back from the edge of tables. Turn saucepan handles away from the edge of the stove. Use a stove guard.
- Have a fire extinguisher or fire blanket in the kitchen that is easy to get to.
- Use placemats instead of tablecloths.

- Use short or curly electric cords that don't hang over the side of benches. Be careful of dangling cords when ironing.
- Many young children can light matches and lighters so make sure they are well out of reach.
- Help prevent scalding by ensuring hot water coming from taps for the bath, shower and sink is at 50C degrees or less. Always run cold water into the bath first and always test it before bathing your child.
- If a child has a burn or scald, cool the burnt area under running cold water for at least 20 minutes. Never use ice to cool the skin. If the burn is bigger than a 20 cent piece, see a doctor or consider taking them to the hospital.

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Use fireguards for open fires, gas or oil heaters, pot belly stoves and radiators.

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Poisoning

Toddlers love to put things in their mouth and to explore everywhere they can. They can't understand poison signs.

- Keep kitchen and laundry detergents out of reach or in a locked cupboard. They can cause chemical burns if swallowed and also burn a child's skin or eyes.
- Use a child resistant medicine cupboard for all medicines, including oral contraceptives. Don't leave medicines on top of your bedside table or in the drawers.
- Check that visitors don't leave bags with tablets in them within your child's reach.
- Keep sheds locked and lock garden products away.
- Make sure children wash their hands after playing outside, and before eating and drinking.
- Keep the Poisons Information Line number (131 126) in your phone and in a prominent place, e.g. on your fridge.

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Keep poisons in their original, labelled containers. Never put poisons into food or drink containers.

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Water safety

Most children who drown are under four years old. It happens very quickly and quietly. Young children can drown in only a few centimetres of water.

- Stay and watch your child, and be at arm's length when they are near or in water, such as the bath, pools (including paddle and inflatable pools), at the beach, near creeks, rivers, swimming pools and dams.
- Make sure children can't get to buckets and other containers holding water. Keep a tight fitting lid on nappy buckets and place out of reach. The water and chemicals both pose a risk to young children.
- All pools should be fenced with a self-closing, self-latching gate. There should be nothing near the fence that a child could climb up on.

It is important to teach your child to swim but it will not prevent drowning. Adult supervision is critical. Learn resuscitation - the first few minutes in an emergency can make the difference between life and death.

Choking and suffocating

- Check there are no small objects or coins left lying around. Keep small batteries from things like cameras away from toddlers. Button batteries can cause very serious injuries if swallowed.
- Don't give your child hard pieces of food such as nuts, apple or raw carrot. Give cooked or grated vegetables. Sit toddlers down to eat, and supervise them.
- Don't force your child to eat anything they don't want.
- Tie a knot in the middle of empty plastic bags so your child can't pull them over their head.
- Replace dummies before they are worn.
- Some old or antique cots and high chairs are not safe for young children. Use a cot or porta-cot that meets Australian standards.

Keep cords or ribbons on toys, dummies and clothing short (less than 10cm) so they can't choke your child. Cords on curtains and blinds need to be short or secured up high and out of reach.

Toys and play

- Check toys and play equipment regularly for sharp edges, splinters and loose parts.
- The surface under climbing frames and swings should be soft and impact absorbing.
- Toys for young children should not have small, loose parts that can be broken off and swallowed. Keep older children's toys with small pieces and small batteries away from toddlers.
- Baby walkers often cause injuries and should not be used.

Electrocution

Have a circuit breaker installed in your fuse box or switchboard. It will switch off the power if there is an electrical fault.

- Buy covers for power points to stop toddlers poking things into them.
- Don't use electric blankets for young children.
- Be careful of electrical appliances near water - it is easy to get electrocuted.
- Make sure all electrical appliances are out of reach.
- Use only wall mounted or ceiling mounted heaters in bathrooms. Install wall mounted heaters up high.

Shopping

- Supermarket shopping carts can tip up if a child pulls on them or jumps around in them. If you have your child in the trolley make sure they sit in the seat and that the safety straps are used.
- Don't let young children wander off. You can lose sight of them very quickly. It is frightening for both of you if they get lost.





Sun

- Whenever possible keep children in the shade. Make sure their favourite play areas are shaded.
- Children can get sunburnt even on cold, cloudy summer days.
- Sunlight through the glass of car windows can burn the skin. There are blinds that can be used on car windows.
- In the sun use a hat and clothing that covers your child's arms and legs. At the beach, use sun-suits rather than just bathers.
- Use a 30+ sunscreen for children, or one that is labelled for sensitive skin. Zinc cream is a very effective sun block. Apply to areas not covered by clothing. It needs to be re-applied often, particularly if children are swimming.

Passive smoking

- Make your home and car smoke-free and avoid smoking around children. It is now illegal in South Australia to smoke in a car with a child under 16 years.

Smoking around children harms their health. Children are more likely to smoke if they see you smoking.

Pets

Having a pet can help children learn to be responsible and caring. It is important to choose the right pet for the family and to always supervise small children around pets.

Farm safety

There are many safety issues for children on farms. Dams, machinery, chemicals, animals, vehicles, workshops and sheds with equipment can all pose a risk if children are not supervised.

Violence and abuse

At times children are harmed, and some even die as a result of abuse, neglect or family violence. If you think a child is in danger, call the Police on 000 or the Child Abuse Report Line on 13 14 78 (see 'Child abuse' and 'Family violence').

Want more information?

Emergency

Police, Fire, Ambulance: 000
Police attendance: 131 444
Domestic violence: 1800 800 098
Poisons Information Line: 13 11 26

Healthdirect

Phone 1300 022 222, 24 hours To speak to a nurse.
www.healthdirect.gov.au

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52
For advice on child health and parenting.
www.parentline.org.au

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 551 800
24 hours Telephone and web counselling for young people aged 5–25 years.
www.kidshelpline.com.au

Raising Children

The Australian Parenting Website
<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

www.families.nsw.gov.au

Various resources to help parents at any stage in life.

Local Services

Goonellabah Child & Family Health Service

Phone 02 6625 0111
9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone 02 6620 7687
8am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Refer to Service Listing for contact details of other local services