

How To Make Your Home Child Safe

By Cathy Knopp

One of the hardest lessons parents have to learn is that it's impossible to make a home completely accident-free. Children's natural curiosity often gets them into trouble. However, there are important steps you can take to protect children and prevent many injuries.

Very young children try to put everything in their mouths. Check floors, tables, chairs and sofa cushions for paper clips, coins and buttons. Never leave sharp objects like scissors, knives and razor blades lying around. Teach older children to keep games and toys with small pieces away from infants and toddlers.

Medicines, vitamins and cosmetics should be stored on a high shelf or in a drawer with a childproof latch. Toiletries like toothpaste, mouthwash, shampoo and soaps should also be kept out of reach. They may seem harmless to you but many items can be toxic if ingested.

Sharp edges on tables should be covered with padded corners to prevent head and eye injuries. Padded corners are available at children's furniture stores and hardware stores. Consider getting rid of glass-topped tables and replacing them with sturdier wooden models. Place ceramic pieces and breakable collectibles in locked cabinets or display cases. Cover all electrical outlets to keep children from poking objects into them. Secure electrical cords and cords from blinds and curtains to prevent children from getting entangled in them.

Make sure door locks are too high for little hands to reach, and install childproof latches on cabinets and drawers. Use L brackets to secure bookshelves and heavy furniture to walls. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Never leave a small child alone in a bathtub or sink. Check your hot water heater to make sure the water temperature never gets dangerously hot. Discourage children from playing with hot and cold water levers.

Take precautions to keep children from falling out of windows. A screen is often not enough to prevent a child from falling through. Use gates to close off stairways so toddlers can't fall. Gates can also be used to keep children out of the home office and other areas that are off-limits.

Place a safety screen around the fireplace to prevent children from getting too close to the fire. Never leave a child unattended in a room with a burning fireplace.

Discourage children from playing in the kitchen while you are preparing food. Better yet, use a safety gate to keep small children out of the kitchen when foods are cooking on top of the stove or in the oven. Keep handles of pots and pans turned away from the front of the stove. Keep counter appliances like toasters and blenders in a cabinet or on a shelf that children can't reach. Avoid using tablecloths. A small child may pull on it and bring everything tumbling down. Store garbage under the sink with a childproof latch or make sure your garbage can has a secure, childproof lid.

Throw away plastic grocery bags immediately or place them in a storage container if you reuse them. Also dispose of plastic dry cleaning bags. Children can suffocate when they place plastic bags on their heads.

Some plants are beautiful but toxic. Keep houseplants out of children's reach and identify plants in your yard that could be dangerous. Shrubs with berries are particularly tempting to children and could result in death if the berries are swallowed. Oleander and wild mushrooms are especially dangerous. Ask your local nursery for a list of poisonous plants that are best avoided.

Drowning claims more children's lives every year. Pools should have a locked fence or pool cover. Never leave a child unattended in a regular pool or a wading pool. Empty water from wading pools after each use and avoid leaving buckets of water sitting around.

Make sure cleaning and laundry supplies are stored in a locked cabinet. Install storage bins in the garage for tools, lawn equipment, fertilizers and pesticides. Garden hoses should be wrapped around a coil or stored in a container.

Keep small children away from pet food dishes, especially when pets are eating. Many tots are bitten when an otherwise docile pet feels its food is threatened.

Kneel on the floor and inspect every place a child could reach. Remember that supervision and prevention are the keys to making your home child safe.