

Childproofing Your Home

Introduction

A home should be a place where children are safe and secure. However, the home can also be a place full of hidden hazards that can seriously injure or kill children. According to the National Safe Kids campaign, unintentional injury is the number one killer of America's children, taking more lives than disease and violence. In the United States, 12 to 14 million children (one in four children under age 15) require medical attention due to accidental injury. It is estimated that 90 percent or more of unintentional injuries can be avoided by taking precautions like childproofing your home. Most home accidents occur because children are exploring and curious in an environment that has not been childproofed. Grandparents should provide a safe, hazard-free environment for their grandchildren.



Safety Concerns

Let's look at some common safety concerns that you might find in your home. There are four areas of danger that you need to look for.

Realms of Danger

► Water

- *Temperature* – Set water heaters to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to help prevent burns from hot water. Anti-scald devices are available for faucets and showerheads. A plumber may need to install them.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warns consumers about hidden drowning hazards for small children in and around the home. Recent data show that a third as many children under the age of 5 (an average of about 115 annually) drown from other hazards around the home as drown in pools.

- *Drowning* – Unlike adults, children's weight is concentrated in the top half of their bodies. When they lean forward, they may lose their balance, fall forward and drown in as little as 1 inch of water. Five-gallon buckets, often used for household chores, pose a serious threat to toddlers. Use toilet latches or an outside latch for the bathroom door. Spas, hot tubs and swimming pools are also drowning hazards. The key to preventing these tragedies is to have layers of protection. These include placing barriers around your pool to prevent access, using pool alarms, closely supervising children and being prepared in case of an emergency. Keep rescue equipment by the pool and know cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

► Fire

- *Stoves* – Keep hot foods and liquids away from young children. Use back burners on the stove, and turn pot handles toward the back of the stove. You can also install knob covers and an oven latch.
- *Fireplaces and space heaters* – Remove the key from gas fireplaces. Make sure there are no flammable materials near the heater. Turn them off when children are present or use screens and other safety devices to prevent access to heat or flame.
- *Matches, lighters, candles* – Make sure they are out of reach of children at all times.
- *Extinguishers* – have one available and know where it is and how to use it.
- Install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide monitors – check monthly.

► Electricity

- *Outlets* – Use outlet covers and outlet plates to help prevent electrocution. Be sure children cannot easily remove the outlet protectors.
- *Cords* – Keep electrical cords out of children's areas or use a "hide-a-cord" safety device.
- *Appliances* – Keep blow dryers, toasters and other appliances unplugged and out of reach.



► Poison

- *Closets and cabinets* – Safety latches and locks on cabinets and drawers can help prevent children gaining access to medicines, household cleaners and other poisons, as well as knives and other dangerous objects.
- Beware of areas of potential poisons such as ammonia, bleach, charcoal lighter, cigarettes, detergents, drain and toilet cleaners, furniture polish, mothballs, glue, insect and rat poison, iodine, kerosene, lighter fluid, spot remover, lye, meat tenderizer, nail polish remover, oven cleaners, paint and varnish, weed killers, hair dye, plant leaves and flowers (rhubarb leaves, castor beans, azaleas, lily-of-the-valley, jimson weed).
- Maintain a smoke-free environment. If you do smoke, only do so outside and never in the car with children present.
- Use a carbon monoxide detector to guard against carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep emergency contact numbers close to the telephone.

It's important to **always** be aware of potential hazards from dangerous objects that are located in or around the home. The following is a list of these potentially dangerous items.

Dangerous Objects

➤ **Doors, stairs and windows**

- Doorknob covers and door locks help prevent children from entering rooms and other areas where there are possible dangers. Be sure the door can still be opened quickly by an adult in case of an emergency.
- Exit doors should be able to be opened by the children. Install an alarm or other signaling device to alert you in case a child attempts to leave.
- Finger pinch guards can be used for doors that are available to children.
- Vision strips should be placed on glass doors.
- Safety gates prevent falls down stairs and keep children away from dangerous areas.
- Window guards – Children can fall from windows opened as little as five inches. Screens can't prevent falls. Install window guards that can be opened only by adults.

➤ **Cords – can cause strangulation.**

- Drapes and blinds – Tie cords of blinds and curtains up out of reach or use a blind cord wind-up device. Remove loops from blinds.
- Clothing drawstrings – Hood and neck drawstrings can get caught in car doors, handrails, play equipment, etc.

➤ **Furniture**

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that 8,000 to 10,000 victims are treated annually in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with tip-over of furniture.

- Furniture should be stable – not likely to tip over. Hardware is available to anchor heavy cabinets to the wall.
- Remove lids from toy boxes.
- Current safety requirements should be met.
- Sharp edges should be covered.

➤ **Toys**

- Check each new or used toy to make sure it is safe and developmentally appropriate for the children who will be using it.
- Age appropriate recommendations are often provided on the packaging of new toys.
- Good repair – second-hand toys should be examined carefully for wear that might make the item unsafe.
- Small pieces that might come off can cause choking.
- Sharp edges can cause cuts.
- Non-toxic materials should be used.
- Pay attention to recalls on toys and follow the directions for removal or repair.

► Other Dangerous Objects

- Plastic bags can suffocate.
- Knives, scissors, razors and other sharp objects can injure.
- Firearms should be unloaded and locked away. Ammunition should be locked in a separate place.
- Heavy items can cause injury.

Remember that unintentional injuries can happen in a second. Childproofing saves lives.

References

Caring for Our Children; National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs, second edition, copyright 2002 by American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care.

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Good Times With Health and Safety, National Network for Child Care, www.nncc.org.

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