

child
safety



Young children need to have a safe environment. They are too young to take care of their own safety. They cannot understand danger. Telling them and teaching them about danger is important, but it does not keep them safe. Keeping young children safe is an adults responsibility. Most injuries to young children happen at home, so it is very important to make your home as safe as possible.

This topic gives some ideas about how to keep young children safe (especially those under five years of age).

What are common childhood injuries?

- The most common causes of injuries among young children are falls - for example, from a table, a bunk bed or a ladder, or falling over when running (e.g. not seeing a step or going too fast to stop safely).
- Other common injuries among children are from swallowing poisons, burns from hot water or fire, drowning, or getting badly sun burnt.
- Children might also get hurt when learning a new skill, such as riding a bike, or when they try using something that belongs to an older child (e.g. a skate board).



Understanding danger

- Young children cannot understand danger. They cannot understand that they might get hurt or even killed even when you have told them about the danger.
- Young children can understand **'Stop'** or **'no'**, but they cannot understand **'Do not run onto the street because you will get hit by a car'**. They are too busy concentrating on running without falling over, and anyway, they did not get hit by a car last time they ran on the road. Toddlers may understand **'no'** but they may not have learned to obey it yet.
- Young children only look at where they are going to (chasing a ball, running to a friend) - they have **'tunnel vision'**.
- They cannot judge whether something, such as a car, is moving, or how fast it is moving.

Keeping children safe

It is the responsibility of adults to work out what might hurt a child, and to work out how to keep young children safe. There is a set of steps that you can follow in order to best protect a child.

Get rid of the danger

For example:

- If you have been using chemicals in the garden, throw away any chemical that is left over.
- Don't have a gun in the house.

Change the hazard so that it is not so dangerous

For example:

- Many children are hurt when they fall off bunk beds. Put the top-level bed down onto the floor so you have two low beds.
- Lie your ladder down on the ground (it can be a fun car, or bus).
- Make the child's outside play area a long way from where the car goes.

Block access to the danger

For example:

- Put medicines and cleaning chemicals into a locked cupboard, and take the key out (or use a 'child-proof' cupboard).
- Always take the keys out of the car.

Change the child so that the risk is lowered

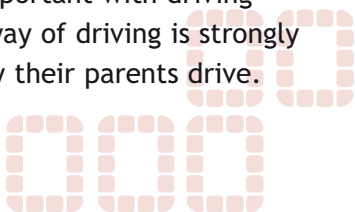
This may sound strange but it means things like:

- Making sure that the child always wears a helmet when riding a bike, or wrist and knee protectors when skating.
- Use sun-protecting clothes and sunscreen.

Always do things the safe way yourself

Children learn from what you do! For example:

- This is particularly important with driving the car. Teenagers' way of driving is strongly influenced by the way their parents drive.



Help them learn skills so that they do things the right way

For example:

- If you have a tree that 'needs' to be climbed, help them learn how to climb down again.
- Help them learn how to use a knife safely.

Teach them by telling them what to do, and what not to do

- Even though small children cannot understand all you say, eventually they will learn to control their own behaviour e.g. talk to them about stopping at the traffic lights, pushing the button, going when the walk sign turns green.
- However, even if small children can tell you all the steps, you still have to be in control.

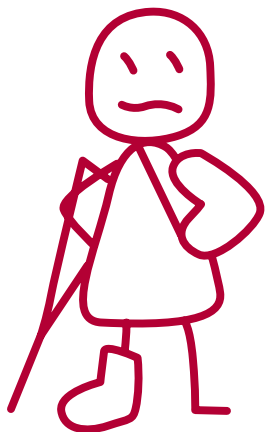
Finally, if they are doing something you think is dangerous, stop it

- Pick them up and put them somewhere safe (you are the adult, and you are bigger).
- If they are too far away, shout something very simple, very loudly, like 'STOP!' Don't say any more words - you need them to concentrate on stopping.

Reminders

- Have emergency phone numbers near the phone:
 - Police, ambulance, fire (in Australia dial **000**)
 - Your doctor
 - Poisons Information **13 11 26** (in all parts of Australia)
- Have a first aid kit in the house and car.
- Install an Earth Leakage Circuit Breaker in your fuse box.
- Install smoke-detectors.
- Check that homes you visit with your child are safe.
- Do a first aid course which includes emergency resuscitation, so that you will know what to do.

The following sections identify some dangers for young children, and ways that can be used to keep children safer.



Traffic safety

- Make fences and gates toddler-proof.
- Young children need to be held when they are near roads. They may begin to remember rules about crossing roads but they are unable to understand them, no matter how many times they are told.
- Your child must be in an approved child restraint in the car, with the straps in the right place and buckles done up.
- Make sure that there is nothing on the dashboard. Even a box of tissues can do a lot of harm in an accident.
- Never put anything heavy in the back of a hatchback unless it secured very strongly.
- When you are moving the car at home, it is safest to have your child in the car, so she cannot be run over.
- When planning play spaces in your yard, keep children's areas well away from the driveway, fenced off if possible.
- Never leave children alone in cars.

Falls

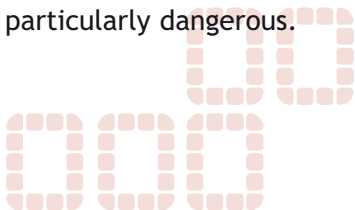
Falls are the major cause of injury for young children.

- Children can always climb higher than you think they can. Don't put things 'out of reach', put them away, 'out of sight'.
- You might have to put chairs up onto the table for a while.
- Use straps in the high chair and pusher.
- Don't leave young children alone on change tables, high chairs etc.
- Falls from shopping trolleys are also common. If you need to have a child in the trolley make sure he is sitting down.

Poisoning

Toddlers explore everywhere they can reach and still put things into their mouths. They cannot understand poison signs.

- Write the POISONS INFORMATION NUMBER next to your phone
 - The Australian Poisons Information Centre is **13 11 26** in every state.
 - They can take calls at any time of the day, and can give you very good first aid advice if needed.
- Keep kitchen and laundry detergents out of reach, preferably in a locked cupboard. Dishwasher powder is particularly dangerous.



- Keep all medicines in their original packaging. Bubble packs are designed to slow children down, so that they take fewer tablets. If a medicine bottle has a child-proof lid, the amount of medicine in that bottle is enough to cause harm to a child, even if the child is the one using the medicine.
- Use a child-proof medicine cupboard for all medicines.
- Check that visitors don't leave bags with tablets in them within your child's reach.
- Keep poisons in their original, labelled containers. Never put poisons into food or drink containers.

Bites from dogs and other animals

- Many young children are bitten by dogs, and most of them involve a dog that the child knows, either the family dog or a neighbour's dog.
- Young children should not be left with dogs because they do not know how to treat a dog correctly. They may hurt the dog, or try to take food from a dog, and even a gentle dog may not tolerate this.

Choking and suffocating

- Check that there are no small objects or coins lying around.
- Don't give your child hard pieces of food such as raw carrot to chew. Give cooked or grated vegetables.

- Toddlers should sit still when eating and you need to stay with your child when your child is eating.
- Never give toddlers peanuts or other nuts.
- Don't force your child to eat anything he does not want.
- Tie plastic bags with a knot in the middle so that they cannot be put over your child's head.
- Cords or ribbons on toys and dummies and clothing should be short so they can't choke your child.
- Cords on curtains and blinds need to be short or out of reach.

Drowning

Most children who drown are under four years old. Drowning happens very quickly and quietly. Young children can drown in only a few centimetres of water. Teaching toddlers or young children how to swim will not prevent drowning.

- Stay with your child whenever he is near or in water, such as the bath, paddle pool or buckets.
- Keep a lid on nappy buckets and keep them out of reach.
- Water can collect in all sorts of things when it rains. Empty them!
- Always make sure that the paddle pool is emptied after use. Every time!



- All other pools should be fenced so that there is no direct access from the house or other parts of the garden, and have a self-locking, **'child-proof'** gate.
- Garden ponds need to be fenced or covered by a strong mesh.

Play

- Check equipment regularly for sharp edges, splinters and loose parts.
- The surface under climbing frames and swings needs to be soft.
- Toys for young children should not have small loose parts that can be broken off and swallowed.

Baby walkers

It is strongly advised that you do not use baby walkers.

- In baby walkers, babies can move around before they are old enough to control what they are doing, so they can run into all sorts of dangers.
- There have been a large number of head injuries to babies under 12 months from using baby walkers, especially from tipping down a step.
- Baby walkers do not help a baby learn to walk, and may even slow down their development.
- Attempts are being made to prevent the sale of baby walkers because of their danger.

- If you do decide to use a baby walker, make sure there is nothing your baby can run into or get hold of that will harm her, e.g. fires, heaters, steps, stairs, cords etc. Always stay near if your baby is in a baby walker. They should never be used before a baby can sit alone, or after the baby can walk.

Sun

- Whenever possible keep children in the shade. Teach them to play in the shade.
- Make sure that 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.
- Young children can become very quickly overheated in parked cars.
- In the sun use a hat and clothing that covers arms and legs, such as cover-up bathers.
- Sunglasses are recommended for children when they are old enough to be able to put them on without poking themselves in the eyes.
- Sunscreen can be used in small amounts on young children on areas that are not covered by clothing. It needs to be re-applied often. Some sunscreens irritate the eyes and sensitive skin. Zinc cream is an effective sun-block.

For more information contact:

- Local Community Child Health Nurse
- Local Family Doctor
- Ngala Family Resource Centre Helpline
8.00 a.m. - 8.00 p.m. 7 days a week
Telephone (08) 9368 9368
Outside metro area - Freecall 1800 111 546
www.ngala.com.au
- Parent Help Centre/Parenting Line
Telephone (08) 9272 1466 (24hr service)
Outside metro area - Freecall 1800 654 432
- Kidsafe WA
Telephone (08) 9340 8509
www.kidsafewa.com.au
- Royal Life Saving WA
(for information on preventing drowning)
Telephone (08) 9383 8200
www.lifesavingwa.com.au

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