



# First Steps

# #42

## Home Safety for Children

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

The safest place for a child should be his or her home. However, without meaning to be careless, some parents are not providing safe surroundings for their small children. “The National Safe Kids Campaign” reports that more than 2,400 children died in home-related injuries in 1997 alone. The main causes of injuries in the home are falls, fires and burns, drowning, suffocation and choking, poisoning, and guns. The greatest threat is to small children. About 2 million children are hurt in home-related injuries each year. Many of these accidents can be easily prevented by child-proofing your home.”

Source: Walker, Victoria. “PageWise”, 2002

### What Are the Major Causes of Injury to Children?

**Falls:** Children are injured when they fall off beds or other furniture, when they slip on the floor, when they fall down stairs or out of windows, and when they slip and fall in the bathtub or shower.

**Burns:** Most burns occur in the kitchen, but children can also be burned if the water in the faucet or bathtub is too hot; burning candles around small children is almost always a danger.



**Wood burning and gas stoves:** Put in child-protective fences or gates to keep children away from fireplaces.

**Drowning:** Most home drownings occur in the bathtub and in swimming pools.

**Suffocation and choking:** Small children try to put almost everything in their mouths. Cords can strangle, and blankets and pillows can suffocate children.

**Firearms:** Children are curious about guns of all kinds, and young children simply do not understand the dangers.

**Poisoning:** Children put things into their mouths; they may think that medicines or insecticides are candy and poisonous liquids are juices.

## What Can Parents Do to Reduce or Prevent Injuries to Children in the Home?

- Never leave babies or small children alone on beds, changing tables, or furniture.
- Always use safety belts on high chairs or other seats for children.
- Always use a safety gate on the stairway; never leave children unattended near stairs.
- Secure rugs on floors with rubber mats.
- Never leave children unattended near open windows. Screens will not keep a child from falling out.
- Never leave a child of any age unattended in the bathroom. Children can slip and fall in a dry bathtub as well as a wet one. Use a slip-proof mat in the tub and shower.
- Always turn pot handles on the stove toward the back of the stove to prevent small hands from reaching up and grabbing them and tipping the contents on to the child.
- Always keep matches and candles out of reach of children.
- Put plugs in unused electrical outlets to prevent children from sticking things in the outlet and getting electrocuted.
- Keep hot food and drinks away from the edge of a counter or table so that small children will not reach up and pull them off.
- Put in and take care of smoke alarms in the bedroom and kitchen areas of your home.
- Guard against children playing with balloons that can pop, leaving pieces which children can choke on.



- Keep purses and suitcases of visiting house guests out of reach of children.
- Keep small items off the floor and out of reach of children who will put them in their mouths and possibly choke on them.
- Never give small children hard candy that they will swallow without chewing and possibly choke on.
- Keep phone cords and window shade cords out of reach of children who can wind them around their neck and strangle themselves.
- Never keep a gun where children of any age (including teens) can get their hands on it.
- Keep guns locked up – unloaded at all times.
- Always keep medications, cleaning supplies, and poisons out of reach of children. If at all possible, put in safety latches on cupboards to protect children from getting in to things like flour, sugar, etc., too. Remember: Poison Control hotline: 1-800-222-1222.
- Turn your water heater down to 120°F. Always test the water with your elbow before putting your child in the tub.
- Always leave the crib's side rails up, and make sure the bars of the crib are not more than 2 and 3/8 inches apart so no part of your baby can get stuck between the bars.
- Keep all plastic bags away from your child (sandwich bags, plastic food wrap, cleaning bags, etc.) and do not put loose plastic over the mattress in his/her crib.

Take the time to child-proof your home to make it safe for your little ones. Never leave your children alone; keep an eye on them at all times because they are curious and will very quickly get into areas and things not intended for children. All of the time you spend child-proofing and being alert and careful will mean fewer injuries and accidents for your precious children.

*For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.*