



by Karen Stephens

# Safety and Accident Prevention Starts At Home

Like it or not, accidents and injuries will happen around the home. Preventing an emergency is always cheaper than treating it, and you save your family the emotional costs of enduring pain and fright during an emergency. The good news is that forewarned can be fore-armed. Through alert observation, parents and child care providers can consistently protect children. Being able to function in *prevention mode* is a necessary parenting skill and a tangible way to show love. Children will be better protected if safe living becomes an ingrained habit. The best teacher for that is your own behavior. After all, children may sometimes do what we say, but they will always do what we DO.

You can give kids safe footsteps to follow. A safety checklist follows. Answer YES or NO to each statement. If an answer is no, circle the item in red. That's your cue to fix a safety hazard — now. Please, don't wait until something bad happens.

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## Prevent Accidental Poisoning

- Cleaning detergents, insecticides, pesticides, and herbicides are in safety-latched cabinets.
- Poisonous plants are kept out of children's reach.
- Medications and vitamins are in safety-latched or locked cabinets.
- Hobby chemicals, such as paint thinner or film developing products, are locked away.
- Family members are able to recognize poisonous insects, snakes, and wild plants.
- Suspected gas leaks from household appliances are fixed.
- Fuel, such as for oil lamps or portable heaters, is stored out of reach.
- Poison Control Center hotline number is posted clearly by the phone.
- Vehicles are never left running in an enclosed area.

## Fire and Burn Prevention

- Everyone knows how to dial 911.
- Everyone knows the fire escape plan and routes.
- A fire extinguisher is kept in the kitchen, garage, and near a fireplace.
- Smoke detectors are installed throughout the home and batteries are regularly checked.
- Matches, fire starters, and lighters are out of children's reach.
- Guards are in place around fireplaces, woodstoves, radiators, or hot pipes.
- Fireplace chimney is professionally cleaned yearly.
- After running 3 minutes, water temperature is 120 degrees or less to prevent scalding.
- Electrical sockets not in use are plugged.
- If a home space heater must be used, it's kept from curtains and flammable materials.
- Trash flammables, such as hair spray or paint cans, are never tossed into a fire.
- Children are always supervised when near burning sticks, leaves, grass, or trash.

## Preventing Falls

- Stairways, indoor and out, have handrails and are clear of toys and tripping hazards.
- Stairways are gated off for very young children.
- In inclement weather, walkways are kept clear of ice.
- Non-slip throw rugs are used.

## Kitchen and Food Safety

- When using a stove, pot handles are turned towards the back of the stove, out of reach of children.

- When possible, only back burners are used on the stove.
- Food poisoning is prevented through safe food storage and preparation.
- Appliance cords are kept out of reach.
- Highchairs and children's eating tables are away from stove or hot appliances.
- Food and drink temperatures are tested before serving to children.
- Hot liquids and foods served at the table are kept out of children's reach.
- All cabinets and drawers are safety-latched.
- Knives, appliance blades, and sharp cooking utensils are out of children's reach.

#### **Garage/Shed Storage Safety**

- Trash is kept in tightly covered container.
- Automotive, woodworking, garden, or house painting tools are out of children's reach.
- Keys to any vehicle are stored out of children's reach.
- Vehicles are always left turned off in the "park" gear.

#### **Transportation Safety**

- Adults and children always buckle up and each child is restrained in an age-appropriate, safety-approved safety seat that has been correctly installed.
- All vehicles have a first aid kit and fire extinguisher on board.
- Children are never, ever left alone in a car, whether it's running or not.
- Car doors are locked when car is in motion.
- Motorcycle riders and bike riders wear a helmet.

#### **Outdoor Play Safety**

- Play space is fenced in or children are continually supervised by an adult.
- When not in use, sandboxes are covered and kiddie pools are drained.
- Swimming pools and garden ponds are fenced off. Swimming children are always supervised. Toys aren't left in pools after play to entice children.
- Protective gear, such as helmets or kneepads, is used when riding bikes or scooters.
- Floatation devices are used during boating, or whenever swimming without supervision.
- All play equipment is assembled correctly, and if applicable, securely anchored.
- There is adequate play space around all equipment, such as swings and slides.
- Climbers have a thick layer of impact absorbing material under fall zones (such as sand).
- Play equipment is free of head, finger, arm, leg, and foot entrapment hazards.
- Children under age 10 never cross the street alone.

- Children are always dressed properly for elements, whether sun or snow/ice.

#### **Toy Safety**

- Toys are painted with non-toxic paint.
- Toys are regularly inspected so broken toys are discarded.
- Wooden toys are kept splinter-free.
- Infants, toddlers, and twos have toys that won't fit into the mouth to cause choking.
- Removable parts on toys aren't small enough to fit into preschooler's nose or ears.
- Only older preschoolers and up use battery-operated toys.
- Storage containers close securely and don't pose pinching hazards.

#### **Sleeping Area Safety**

- Infants are placed on their backs to sleep.
- Children's sleepwear is fire-retardant.
- Shelving isn't top-heavy and can't easily be pulled over onto a child's body.
- Beds are away from radiators or other hot surfaces.
- Infant and toddler's crib slats are no more than 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches apart.
- Bed mattress fits sides of crib or bed snugly.

#### **Bathroom Safety**

- Razors, razor blades, and sharp objects are out of children's reach.
- Bottom of tub or shower has rubber stickers or mat to prevent slipping.
- Young children are never left in the tub without adult supervision.
- Potential poisons, such as shampoos, deodorant, cosmetics, are out of children's reach.
- Hairdryers, curling rods, razors are never left plugged in and are used away from water.

#### **General Safety Precautions**

- First aid kit is fully stocked and regularly replenished.
- Guns are never stored loaded with ammunition. Guns have safety locks that are conscientiously used. Guns and ammunition are always in a locked cabinet away from children.
- Small hobby objects, such as sewing buttons, safety pins, glue guns, are out of children's reach.
- Indoor and outdoor safety checks are conducted regularly.
- Emergency response plans (fire or tornado) are established and practiced regularly.
- Children under age 12 are never left home alone.
- Plastic bags, curtain cords, and shade pulls are out of children's reach.
- Windows have screens and locks.
- Purses, brief cases and adult backpacks of family and visitors are out of children's reach. (Such items might have cigarette lighters, pocket knives, or other items that are dangerous if children have access to them.)

**About the Author** — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. For nine years she wrote a weekly parenting column in her local newspaper. Karen has authored early care and education books and is a frequent contributor to *Exchange*.

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