

Children and Safety

Whether you are a new parent, a parent with a toddler, a teenager or somewhere in between, safety has likely been a topic of conversation. When a new baby comes home, parents are taught about ways to keep infants safe while sleeping, bathing and eating. As children grow, the risk of unintentional injury also grows. Children have a natural instinct to explore their environment and to learn to move through rolling crawling and later walking. The more a child moves and explores the more potential that he will find danger. There are many things parents can do to keep their children of any age safe in their home environment as well as outside the home.

One of the biggest challenges with safety and young children is that these little ones have no fear or concept of danger. Young children do not realize that they may be headed for a dangerous situation and this continues until children are much older and even into their teen years. Developmentally, children do not understand when their parent explains that something may be dangerous. A parent who sees a potentially dangerous situation for a preschooler may warn his child to “be careful”. The young child will often respond “I’m not going to fall.” This child has no intention of falling, therefore believes that he won’t fall. Children often take risks because they do not realize what those risks are. If you happen to look at the children in your neighbourhood who are on bicycles and scooters, chances are some of them will not be wearing a helmet. They have probably forgotten to put the helmet on or have decided that there is no need since they are just going up and down their own street and they have no intention of getting hurt.

Statistically unintentional injury remains the leading cause of death in children 0-19 years of age. In 2005/2006, 720 Canadians under the age of 20 died as a result of unintentional injury and 29,142 Canadians in this same age group were hospitalized due to injury (Public Health Agency of Canada Statistics). This includes motor vehicles accidents, drowning, bicycle and pedestrian injuries, burns, poisons and falls. The greatest risks to children can be prevented. So how can parents protect their children from unintentional injuries?

- Take the time to read articles on safety from parenting magazines and books. The best time to do this is during pregnancy, as it is never too early start educating yourself on the safety of children.
- Childproof your home at each developmental stage your child is in. What may be safe today might not be safe tomorrow.
- The internet offers many safety websites from home safety, to seasonal safety tips (summer and winter activity safety) to stranger safety and internet safety for children and youth.

- If your child attends a day home, daycare or preschool, ask about their rules around safety.
- Talk to your child regularly about safety in many different environments using concrete examples. Talk about fire safety and have a plan to keep everyone safe.
- Watch cartoons on television with your child and talk about the distortion of safety i.e.) once a character has died, he can't come back to life.
- Purchase safety equipment for your child such as car seats and bicycle helmets and always use them.
- Register your child for camps or special events that teach safety in different environments.

Most children can turn a safe environment into a potentially dangerous situation simply by not recognizing that their actions can result in unintentional injury. Even the best safety equipment won't protect your child if it is misused or not used at all. An important role as parents is to learn and do everything you can to protect your child from dangers. Supervising your child at all times is the key to keeping them safe. If you would like more information on how to keep your child safe, visit www.safekidscanada.ca or call 1-888-SAFE-TIP (723-3847).

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