

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Safety

Children can only learn and develop in an environment in which they are safe to explore and interact. But young children are not fully aware of the risks that may be present or know their own limits. For example, a toddler may not realize that climbing on a shelf could cause the shelf to tip over. Therefore, protecting the safety of young children is a critical responsibility of caregivers and requires prevention and attention to supervision.

How do you select safe materials and equipment?

- Choose toys and equipment that match the size and age of the children in care. Use product labels to identify the age range for which toys or equipment are designed.
- Do not use or store objects smaller than 1¾ inches in diameter or and toys with small detachable parts around children who put toys in their mouths (infants or toddlers). Use a “choke test tube” to check toy size.
- Select toys and equipment that are made of durable, easy-to-clean materials. Cloth toys such as stuffed animals must be machine washable.
- Check all toys and equipment for sharp edges, cracks, torn or worn parts, rough edges, and splintered pieces. Repair or replace any items that show damage.
- Avoid toys with strings or cords.
- Select only toys or materials (including art products) that are labeled non-toxic.
- Check the Consumer Products Safety Commission website regularly to identify toys or equipment that have been recalled and are no longer safe for use with young children.
<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prerel.html>
- Verify that all plants in the indoor and outdoor space accessible to the children are nonpoisonous.

What is the best way to store materials?

- All cleaning materials, pest killers (ant killer, fly strips, etc), house paints, lawn fertilizers, and other toxic or hazardous materials (any item labeled “keep out of reach of children”) must be locked out of the reach of children.
- Medications must be stored in child-safe containers *and* be kept in a locked container away from the children.
- Sharp knives, food processors, toasters, grinders, blenders, irons and other equipment that could cause injury must be stored out of the reach of the children.
- Candles and other heat sources must be out of children’s reach.

Always do routine safety checks

The toys, equipment, materials and spaces young children use routinely are subject to wear. Even toys that start out in excellent condition will, over time, become worn and potentially dangerous. To prevent injuries to children it is important to conduct a daily safety check of the environment. Most caregivers take time to conduct this check each morning, before children arrive. During the safety check, address the following:

- All electrical outlets have safety covers.
- Electrical cords (including extension cords) are out of traffic paths and are not a tripping hazard.

- Emergency exits are not obstructed by furniture or equipment and doors swing open without obstruction.
- Cords for window blinds are not within reach of children (including children's cribs). Cords are secured with tie down or tension devices and are not looped in such a way to create a strangulation hazard.
- Chemicals, detergents, cleaners, insect repellants and pesticides are stored in a locked area away from children.
- Matches, space heaters, candles or other heating appliances are out of children's reach.
- Water temperatures in hand washing sinks are between 60 and 120 degrees F.
- Tables, chairs, shelves, storage units, etc. are free of sharp edges, chips, splinters, cracks or rough edges.
- Toys are in good repair and do not have sharp edges, splintered pieces, loose pieces, chipped or peeling paint, cracks, or other signs of damage.
- Infant cribs are in excellent condition, have a snug-fitting mattress, and do not have pillows, bumper pads, loose blankets or damaged slats.
- Stairs are not accessible to infants or toddlers.
- Lighting is in working order, bulbs are replaced as needed.
- Floors are smooth and even, without holes, ledges or other tripping hazards.
- Loose baseboards, peeling paint or torn or peeling wallpaper are repaired.
- Rugs have non-slip backing.
- Open windows have secure screens.
- Windows are free of cracked or broken glass.
- Emergency evacuation plans are posted and clearly visible.
- Poison control phone numbers are easily accessible near each telephone.
- First aid supplies are fully stocked and accessible to caregivers.
- Walkways are clear and level and do not have slipping hazards such as ice or sand.
- Outdoor spaces are free of trash, broken bottles or other debris. Play areas are also free of pests or feces left from pests or neighborhood pets.
- Cushioning materials under climbing equipment are evenly distributed and extend at least six feet in all directions from outside edge of play equipment.
- Outdoor play area is free of tripping hazards such as roots, rocks, tree stumps or exposed concrete footings.
- The playground is fenced and the fence has no holes, broken boards, etc. that would allow children to leave the playground unsupervised.
- Power and hand tools, mowers, etc. are stored away from children.
- Playground gates are latched and in working order.
- Any rooms or areas that are unsafe or off limits to children have doors that are closed and latched (latches are out of children's reach).
- Heavy objects and furniture are secured so they cannot be pulled over by a child.
- Pot handles and stove controls are not accessible to children.