

Volunteer Leaders TraininG Guide

Childproofing Your Home

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Objectives

- To share with participants the importance of childproofing for safety.
- To share with participants ways to determine and correct safety hazards in the home.

Target Audience

- EHC leaders
- Adult audiences

Introduction

A home should be a place where children are safe and secure. However, the home can also be a place full of hidden hazards that can seriously injure or kill children. According to the National Safe Kids campaign, unintentional injury is the number one killer of America's children, taking more lives than disease and violence. In the United States, 12 to 14 million children (one in four children under age 15) require medical attention due to accidental injury. It's estimated that 90 percent or more of unintentional injuries can be avoided by taking precautions like childproofing your home. Most home accidents occur because children are exploring and curious in an environment that has not been childproofed. Homeowners should provide a safe, hazard-free environment for children.

Do your grandchildren visit you at your home? Do you invite neighborhood children into your home? Do you ever have guests over that have young children? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it's important to make sure your home is safe, even for guests.

Let's check your safety knowledge with the following quiz (**Activity Sheet 1**). We will review the answers to the quiz at the end of the lesson.

Main Teaching Points

Let's look at some common safety concerns that you might find in your home. There are four areas of danger that you need to look for.

Realms of Danger

➤ Water

- *Temperature* – Set water heaters to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to help prevent burns from hot water. Anti-scald devices are available for faucets and showerheads. A plumber may need to install them.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warns consumers about hidden drowning hazards for small children in and around the home. Recent data show that a third as many children under the age 5 (an average of about 115 annually) drown from other hazards around the home as drown in pools.

- *Drowning* – Unlike adults, children’s weight is concentrated in the top half of their bodies. When they lean forward, they may lose their balance, fall forward and drown in as little as 1 inch of water. Five-gallon buckets, often used for household chores, pose a serious threat to toddlers. Use toilet latches or an outside latch for the bathroom door. Spas, hot tubs and swimming pools are also drowning hazards. The key to preventing these tragedies is to have layers of protection. These include placing barriers around your pool to prevent access, using pool alarms, closely supervising children and being prepared in case of an emergency. Keep rescue equipment by the pool and know cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

➤ Fire

- *Stoves* – Keep hot foods and liquids away from young children. Use back burners on the stove, and turn pot handles toward the back of the stove. You can also install knob covers and an oven latch.
- *Fireplaces and space heaters* – Remove the key from gas fireplaces. Make sure there are no flammable materials near the heater. Turn them off when children are present or use screens and other safety devices to prevent access to heat or flame.
- *Matches, lighters, candles* – Make sure they are out of reach of children at all times.
- *Extinguishers* – have one available and know where it is and how to use it.
- Install smoke detectors and check monthly.

➤ Electricity

- *Outlets* – Use outlet covers and outlet plates to help prevent electrocution. Be sure children cannot easily remove the outlet protectors.
- *Cords* – Hide electrical cords or use a “hide-a-cord” safety device.
- *Appliances* – Keep blow dryers, toasters and other appliances unplugged and out of reach.

➤ Poison

- *Closets and cabinets* – Safety latches and locks on cabinets and drawers can help prevent children from gaining access to medicines, household cleaners and other poisons, as well as from knives and other dangerous objects.
- Beware of these areas of potential poisons: ammonia, bleach, charcoal lighter, cigarettes, detergents, drain and toilet cleaners, furniture polish, mothballs, glue, insect and rat poison, iodine, kerosene, lighter fluid, spot remover, lye, meat tenderizer, nail polish remover, oven cleaners, paint and varnish, weed killers, hair dye, plant leaves and flowers (rhubarb leaves, castor beans, azaleas, lily-of-the-valley, jimson weed).
- Maintain a smoke-free environment.
- Use a carbon monoxide detector to guard against carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep emergency contact numbers close to the telephone.

It's important to **always** be aware of potential hazards from dangerous objects that are located in or around the home. Let's look closely and identify these potentially dangerous items.

Dangerous Objects**➤ Doors, stairs and windows**

- Doorknob covers and door locks help prevent children from entering rooms and other areas where there are possible dangers. Be sure the door can still be opened quickly by an adult in case of an emergency.
- Exit doors should be able to be opened by the children. Install an alarm or other signaling device to alert you in case a child attempts to leave.
- Finger pinch guards can be used for doors that are available to children.
- Vision strips should be placed on glass doors.
- Safety gates prevent falls down stairs and keep children away from dangerous areas.
- Window guards – Children can fall from windows opened as little as five inches. Screens can't prevent falls. Install window guards that can be opened only by adults.

➤ Cords – can cause strangulation.

- Drapes and blinds – Tie cords of blinds and curtains up out of reach or use a blind cord wind-up device. Remove loops from blinds.
- Clothing drawstrings – Hood and neck drawstrings can get caught in car doors, handrails, play equipment, etc.

➤ **Furniture**

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that 8,000 to 10,000 victims are treated annually in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with the tip over of furniture.

- Furniture should be stable – not likely to tip over. Hardware is available to anchor heavy cabinets to the wall.
- Remove lids from toy boxes.
- Current safety requirements should be met.
- Sharp edges should be covered.

➤ **Toys**

- Check each new or used toy to make sure it is safe and developmentally appropriate for the children who will be using it.
- Age appropriate recommendations are often provided on the packaging of new toys.
- Good repair – second-hand toys should be examined carefully for wear that might make the item unsafe.
- Small pieces that might come off can cause choking.
- Sharp edges can cause cuts.
- Non-toxic materials should be used.

➤ **Other Dangerous Objects**

- Plastic bags can suffocate.
- Knives, scissors, razors and other sharp objects can injure.
- Firearms should be unloaded and locked away. Ammunition should be locked in a separate place.
- Heavy items can cause injury.

Refer participants to **Handout 1, “Childproofing Your Home,”** has been created so that you can use it as a checklist for your home.

Optional Activity

We are going to look at a few pictures to help us identify potential hazards in a home. This five-month-old baby is visiting at her grandparents’ home. What’s wrong with this picture? (Visual 6 from PowerPoint). *(Allow a few minutes for participants to list hazards. Invite participants to share answers.)*

Let’s identify the child safety hazards from this picture. Mention any of the ones not previously discussed above.

1. Electrical outlet needs plugs.
2. Purse should not be accessible to child.
3. Stuffed bunny has removable parts that could be a choking hazard.
4. Balloon is a choking hazard.
5. Small toys on the coffee table are not appropriate for a baby and are choking hazards.
6. Toy with drawstring is a strangulation hazard.

7. When toddlers are present, coffee table and end table edges need to be cushioned.
8. Babies or toddlers could take leaves from table decoration and choke on them.
9. Glass table decoration could break and injure a child.
10. Child is not being closely supervised.

Now, let's look at a new picture (Visual 7). What steps have improved the safety of this room? (*Allow a few minutes for participants to list the childproofing that has taken place in the room.*)

1. Unsafe toys are removed.
2. Child care provider is closely supervising the baby.
3. Outlet plugs are in use.
4. Table edges are being covered.
5. Unsafe table decorations are removed.

Many safety devices have been developed to help protect children from injury. Safety devices are necessary for any home that young children may enter.

(You can purchase or collect the items below to show what it is used for and/or how it is used and tell the price. Some of the items listed below may not be available in your area.)

- Outlet covers and outlet plates – help prevent electrocution. Be sure children cannot easily remove the outlet protectors. There are several types available.
- Stove knob guards – cover the knobs and prevent children from turning on the stove or oven.
- Safety latches and locks are used for cabinets and drawers in kitchens, bathrooms and other areas to help prevent poisonings and other injuries. These help prevent children from gaining access to medicines and household cleaners as well as knives and other sharp objects.
- Doorknob covers and door locks help prevent children from entering rooms and other areas with possible dangers. Doorknob covers and door locks can help keep children away from places with hazards, including swimming pools.
- Edge guards and corner bumpers help prevent injuries from falls against sharp edges of furniture and fireplaces. Corner and edge bumpers can be used with furniture and fireplace hearths to help prevent injuries from falls or to soften falls against sharp or rough edges.
- Cord covers – help prevent children from strangling in blind cord loops.
- Pinch guards – help protect children's fingers from getting pinched in doors.

Safety devices can be bought at hardware stores, baby shops, discount department stores, through mail order and over the Internet.

Let's review the answers to the quiz we took at the beginning of this lesson. (*Review the answers to the quiz using **Activity Sheet 1: Answers.***)

Remember that unintentional injuries can happen in a second. Childproofing saves lives.

References

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