

Leaflet for parents

Helping your child to grow up safely in the home

From the day your child is born they are learning about their new world. From only a few months of age your child will start to reach out to touch things (an essential way of learning) and will move their arms and legs in excitement, discomfort or frustration.

- As soon as they can lift their feet in the air they can roll over. Never leave your baby alone even for a second, on a raised surface or a higher level such as changing station, as they could roll off.



From a few months of age they are able to reach out and manipulate objects in their hands, but do not have the knowledge or skills to control fine movements or understand what is safe and unsafe to put into their mouths.

It is an exciting time watching your child being able to do something for the first time, share the pleasure with them.

- For babies and small children shiny and small objects may seem very attractive so it can be much safer to keep objects that can be swallowed or cause injury or choking, completely out of sight. Being out of reach does not always mean that a child will not be able to reach an object. Keeping dangerous objects in a locked cupboard is much safer.



For toddlers (from about 1 year) it is an exciting, confusing and frustrating time and a very vulnerable time for accidents to happen. They are becoming more mobile by crawling, bottom shuffling or walking around furniture and are exploring further.

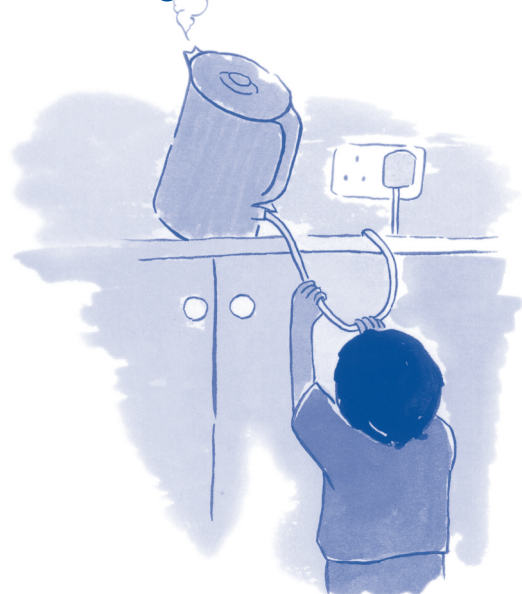
- Most children suffer minor accidents during their childhood and learning to walk may take a lot of practice and a few minor bumps and bruises before it is perfected.

- Using safety equipment will help to make the home a little safer, but will only help to create a safer environment if it is considered in relation to your child's development and used as an addition to careful supervision.
- It can be helpful to anticipate your child's next stages of development and think about what you might need to make your home safe in advance. For example, if your child is showing signs of crawling fix a stairgate at the top and bottom of stairs, or depending on the layout of your home, on the door to the kitchen.

Children need some freedom to explore and learn about their surroundings with appropriate support and guidance from you. It is important they are guided safely and limits are set. Avoid confrontation and be firm when needed. If there is a possibility of danger there can be no room for negotiation. Your child may find this difficult at times especially if they are very attracted to the activity or place. It might be helpful for your child to accept the situation if you are able to think about what they could do instead.

Boundaries are an important part of helping a child to feel safe and to explore and learn. It is important that their actions i.e. climbing up onto the work surface using a chair, receive the same response each time, as attempting it without supervision may result in an accident/injury. Support your child to play and learn safely by using encouraging words and actions.

Try this: Many parents have found it helpful to look at their home from a toddler's view. Crawl around on your hands and knees and you will find how different the house looks and how you may feel the need to climb higher to see what is out of sight.



- Young children cannot understand the effects of their actions and that reaching/climbing up to explore the mug or kettle on the work surface may cause a lot of pain and suffering if they pull it towards them and are scalded by the hot fluid. A hot drink stays hot enough to scald 15 minutes after being made.
- Keep dangerous substances (household chemicals, tablets, medicines) locked away.

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TIP

Your child will climb on things to explore what is higher up. Let them stand on a chair with you behind them, and with supervision they can wash the unbreakable pots and pans and explore the higher level, with dangerous objects out of reach.

Involve your child in domestic routines and allow time for play during care routines.

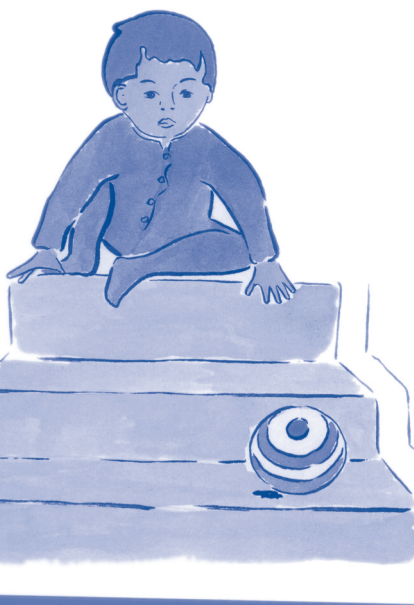
Playing and learning

Playing and copying others is how your child learns. Find time to play and talk with your child from day one. When you are together, explain what you are doing 'lets change you into a nice clean nappy'. They will begin to learn from your reactions (what you say, tone of voice) what you are happy for them to do, but will not understand why you say no to some actions (as they could be dangerous) and not to others. Children respond and are guided by your responses to their actions.

As they become older their imagination develops. They may begin to copy characters (i.e. Superman) or may try things they have seen on television. Give them the freedom to use their imagination but help them to use it safely. When they are imagining they are Action Man jumping off a high rock it may be safer encouraging them to jump in the garden or park rather than them trying it off the back of the settee.

Help them to play, learn and explore safely.

A few hints and tips



Think about how you feel and what your worries are for your child. It can help to talk to family friends or professionals such as your health visitor.

Using equipment such as fireguards, safety gates and cupboard locks will help to make your home a safer place for your child to explore.

Whilst it is not possible to watch your child every second of the day it is important not to rely solely on the use of safety equipment. Your knowledge, understanding and thoughtful supervision of your child will be the first successful barrier to preventing injuries occurring.

- ✓ Keep objects and things that may cause injury or harm out of reach and out of sight. Small children cannot understand dangers. As your child grows it is useful to think about their development and how you might explain dangers to them. This can be done in many ways; talking about things as you do them, simple age appropriate explanations or story books.
- ✓ Keep your child safe and actively occupied with a range of toys and activities. This will reduce the time for more dangerous exploration and increase their confidence.
- ✓ Use toys appropriate for their age and that are up to safety standards. Some toys are labelled 'Not suitable for a child less than 36 months' because of small parts that could be swallowed. Be aware that older children love to share their toys (which may contain small parts) with younger children.
- ✓ By using diversion 'let's go and build a house with your brio' some potential dangers can be avoided.
- ✓ Anticipation is the key. You need to be one step ahead of your child and try and think from their view what they might find interesting to explore. Be aware of what your child could get up to when they are out of your sight for a few seconds.
- ✓ Make your home safer, fit a smoke alarm – it will warn you of a fire and give you valuable time to escape.

If your child suffers an accident/injury

After an accident it is quite usual for your child to feel bewildered and frightened and as a parent for you to feel guilty and powerless. Following the accident they will require kindness and understanding and so may you.

If there are any injuries, these may need treatment. Seek medical attention as soon as possible if your child is distressed or you are concerned about an injury. If your child suffers a burn or scald however small it may appear, seek medical attention promptly. If you need advice you can contact NHS Direct, your GP or local Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department.

If your child needs to go to hospital try to remain calm and explain clearly to them what is happening. It is often helpful if another relative or friend can come along to give support. It is also quite usual for siblings or friends who witness an accident to be quite upset or distressed by it and to also need support. Sometimes there can be a delayed reaction of several days. They may show this by being quiet and withdrawn, or doing things out of character.

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At hospital ask questions about any treatment your child is receiving. At a later time consider what led to the accident and consider what can be done to prevent a similar event happening again. You may find that your child may be clingier for a while, sleeping less well, suffering nightmares or physical symptoms such as sickness or headaches. Do not hesitate to discuss any areas you are concerned about with your health visitor or GP.

It is quite usual to need support after an accident. You may prefer to talk with family and friends or you may wish to talk to your health visitor or GP. If you wish to talk to other parents who have been through a similar experience ask your health visitor for advice.

Pictures courtesy of 'The Accident Notebook' 1997. Care of The Community Shop, 518 Stratford Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham, B11 4JJ