

# STEP 1

## make your place safe

Make your place as safe as possible for your children

### Why?

Injuries from falls, poisoning, scalds, choking and dog bites are the main reasons children end up in hospital. The most common place for these injuries to happen is in a child's own home.

It makes sense, then, that we try to make where we live as safe as possible for our children. This Step takes a look at the ways injuries can happen to children at home, and what families can do to try to prevent them.

There is no need to go over every part of this Step with your children. Do what you need to do to make your place safe and talk to your children about what they can do to help.

### what territory kids say...

"My big sister drank cleaning stuff when she was little. She nearly died." (girl aged 7)

"My friend got bitten on the face by his dog and had to have stitches." (boy aged 6)

"I feel safer because we've got security screens on our doors and windows now." (boy aged 10)

"My friend's got a big scar on her arm from her mum's coffee." (girl aged 8)



### falls

Falls are the most common cause of injury to children. For little kids falls are most likely to happen on stairs and with baby furniture such as prams, pushers and high chairs. For older kids the cause is more likely to be from playground equipment, trampolines or playing sport.



### parent tips

- Use five-point harnesses in high chairs, prams and pushers.
- Put in door gates or stair barriers to stop younger children and toddlers getting up or down stairs. (Kidsafe NT warns against baby walkers, which can lead to falls and injuries.)
- Put impact-absorbing material under playground equipment such as swings and slides. Make sure all play equipment is in a shady place to protect kids from skin cancer and burns from hot surfaces.
- If possible, set trampolines into the ground. Cover the springs with absorbent padding, and keep a watch over kids.



## poisoning

The kitchen, bathroom, laundry and garden shed can contain substances that are poisonous. Kids might not know the difference between containers that hold food and drink and those that hold chemicals and detergents. Pills and lollies can look the same. Together, these things can make up a poisonous recipe for a curious child.



### parent tips

- Put child-resistant locks on laundry, kitchen and bathroom cupboards that contain medicines, cleaning products and toiletries (including deodorants, perfume, shaving lotions).
- Keep alcohol and medicines locked away from children.
- Don't store things like chemicals and cleaning products in food containers. Keep them in their original containers with child-resistant lids.
- Keep medicines and pills in their original packaging. Get rid of old medicines properly. Ask your local pharmacist how.



## scalds

Serious scalds can be caused by children turning on the hot water tap in the bath, or by being put into a scalding hot bath. Other nasty scalds are caused by hot liquids from drinks, kettles, jugs, saucepans and microwaved food such as two-minute noodles.



## dog bites

Dogs don't often bite children, but when they do they can cause injury and it can be very frightening. Most dog bites to children are by the family dog or a dog owned by friends. Many bites needing hospital treatment are to a child's head or face.



### parent tips

- Make sure the thermostat control on your hot water system is set below 50°C.
- Keep electrical cords, jugs and irons out of reach of children.
- Be careful with hot drinks and cooking, especially when children are around.
- Keep the handles of saucepans turned in when cooking on the stove.




### parent tips

- If you have a dog, it's a good idea to have a secure area where it can be by itself, away from children.
- Teach your children to have a healthy respect for all dogs, including your own.
- If you're getting a new dog, get some advice about the type of dog that would best suit your situation. Make sure all your family takes some responsibility for your dog's behaviour and training. Contact the RSPCA or your local vet if you need some information or help.

## house fires and burns

House fires start in a number of ways. These include electrical faults, cooking and cigarettes. Some fires happen when children play with matches or lighters at home or in vehicles.



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- Install a smoke detector and check the battery regularly.
  - Keep matches and lighters away from children.
  - Keep heaters away from curtains, furniture, clothing and bedding.
  - Put in a safety switch (earth leakage circuit breaker) and check all electrical appliances for frayed cords, smoking and loose wiring.
  - Don't overload power points. Think about using a surge-protector for electronic and electrical devices.
  - Have an evacuation plan and get your family to practise it.
  - Place candles or oil burners on a safe surface away from curtains or bedding. NEVER leave them lit when you leave the room, not even for a little while.
  - Watch kids closely around barbecues and campfires. Make sure campfires are properly put out and covered.
  - Install a fire extinguisher and flame-smothering blanket in the kitchen (away from the stove or oven).
  - Check that windows can be used to get outside safely.
  - Always keep keys for locked external doors within reach of the door.

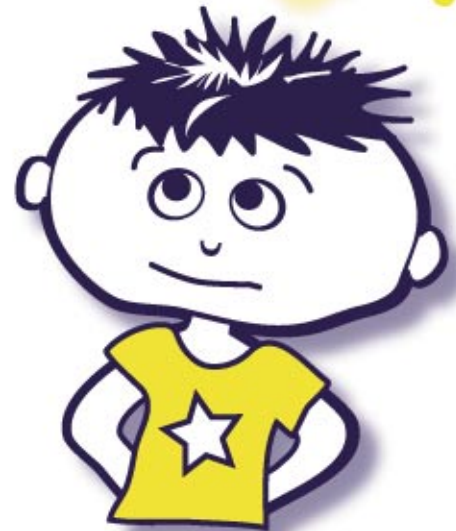
parent tips



# teach your children what to do if there's a fire

When someone dies in a house fire, it's usually because smoke or poisonous fumes have overcome them. It is therefore important that everyone knows how to get out of a house fire safely.

- **YELL and BANG** on walls to let your family know of danger.
- **DON'T** open a door that's hot to touch (the fire might be on the other side).
- **WALK**, don't run, from a burning building.
- **CRAWL** under smoke – **GET DOWN LOW** and **GO, GO, GO!** away from the fire.
- **STOP, DROP** and **ROLL** if your clothes catch on fire. Stop walking, drop to the ground and roll to put out the fire.
- **COOL** any burns with cool running water.
  - Have a **MEETING PLACE** outside that everyone knows to go to.
  - **DON'T** go back inside for pets or valuables.



family activity

## get your family together and pretend there is a fire in your home

Close your eyes (or cover them with a scarf) and practise finding your way out of the house. Make it fun so your kids don't get scared, but will know what to do ... just in case.

1. Tell your children to crawl to keep under smoke.
2. Practise getting out from different rooms.
3. Have more than one way to get out of the house.
4. Meet at your special meeting place outside.
5. Practise "GET DOWN LOW and GO, GO, GO!", and "STOP, DROP and ROLL".



Territory children have one of the highest rates of drowning in Australia. It's the most common cause of death in children under five years, and many children are hospitalised and suffer from near-drowning accidents. Most children drown in their own or a friend's pool. Small children can drown in just a few centimetres of water.

## parent tips



- Always closely watch young children when they're in or near water, including the bath. Don't expect older kids to do it.
- If you have a pool or spa, make sure you have isolation fencing and secure gates. Check out the Northern Territory regulations with a Pool Safety Advisor on **1300 301 059** or email [watersafety@nt.gov.au](mailto:watersafety@nt.gov.au)
- Enrol older kids and adults (including grandparents) in a First Aid course.
- Enrol younger kids in an accredited water safety course.
- Empty toddler pools and baths and store them upright.
- Empty containers that catch a lot of water.
- Cover backyard ponds with a strong fixed grill with spaces no bigger than 2.5 cm.
- Keep nappy buckets covered and out of reach of children.
- Teach your children how to behave safely in and around water.



## extra tips for house and yard safety



### parent tips

- Don't leave your keys in the car. Many kids have crashed their parents' cars or become trapped in power windows.
- Never leave a young child alone in a car and NEVER leave kids or pets locked in a car on a hot day.
- Check your children are in a safe place before backing your car out of the driveway.
- Make sure your children wear a helmet when using a bike, rollerblades, scooter or skateboard, and wear wrist, elbow and knee guards when on rollerblades or skateboards.
- Make "Family Rules" about playing on beds near ceiling fans and in areas where children can fall or be injured.
- Cover powerpoints with plastic protectors and tell kids (even older kids) not to play with them.
- Teach your kids to play safely with equipment and other children.
- Keep firearms unloaded and locked up, with ammunition stored separately.
- Clean up rubbish in the yard and keep outdoor tools and equipment locked away safely where children can't play with or be injured by them.
- Check the yard for poisonous plants, such as oleander and lantana. Remove or isolate them with fencing. Keep the Poisons Information number handy: **13 11 26**.
- If you live in an area where there might be cyclones, bushfires or flooding, make sure your family has a plan and everyone knows what to do.
- Teach your children what to do in a storm. For example, "don't use the phone, don't use the computer and don't go swimming". Have torches ready for blackouts.

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## SOURCES

**7 Steps to Safety** was developed in consultation with Northern Territory parents, children and service providers and from current Australian and overseas literature. Kit developed by Meron Looney, Project Worker, "Family Safety Plan Kit". Editorial assistance by Ros Moye. For further information contact Office of Children and Families, Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services, Australia on 1800 005 485 or email [families@nt.gov.au](mailto:families@nt.gov.au)

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