

STEP 4

what's special about our family?

To help make your Safety Plans in Steps 2, 3, 5 and 7, work out what's special about your family

Why?

Families are always changing. They can grow bigger and smaller. Family members can live together or live apart. Some children live between places; others mostly live in one place. Families can go through tough times, and then things can get easier.

Because families change and are different from each other, each family's Safety Plans will also change and be different from those of other families.

Take a look at the following families. See if they have any tips that can help you decide what you need to include in your Safety Plans, as well as what you might need to think about and practise with your children.

what territory kids say...

We move around a lot. It's hard to remember where we live sometimes." (boy aged 13)

"My mum has heart disease and she's in bed all the time. She needs me to look after her." (girl aged 9)

"We live on a big cattle station. It's a long way away from anywhere." (boy aged 9)





families who travel around or are new to an area

Does your family move around a lot? You might be travelling around Australia or be in the Defence Force, or you might move between towns, camps or communities.



parent tips



1. Try to find trusted people who your children can contact for support if they feel scared or don't know what to do. You can put their names on each child's "Helper Plan" (Step 3).
2. Help your children learn their new address each time they move, so they can tell someone in an emergency. Write it with their new phone number on their "Emergency Contacts" list (Step 5).

families where a parent has a physical illness or disability or a mental health issue

There might be a bigger chance in your family that your children will need to get help if you suddenly become sick or can't care for them. Children can worry about what might happen to them and feel a lot of responsibility to care for their parents.



1. Talk to your children about your illness to help them understand.
2. Keep medications and syringes safely locked away where kids can't get them.
3. Make a "Care Plan" (Step 7) with each child in case you get sick.
4. Practise what to do in an emergency (Step 5) with your kids to help them feel more confident about what to do.
5. Get some extra support for your children if needed. Carers NT provides short-term and emergency assistance to families, and a Young Carers program to help support people under 26 years with care responsibilities. Call Carers NT on **1800 242 636** (toll free) for details of carer support and respite services in your area.
6. If necessary, get some training for older children in things like manual handling, First Aid and other safety issues. You might need a seizure plan!



parent tips

families who use drugs and alcohol

If people living in or visiting your house use alcohol, drugs (such as morphine, cannabis, benzodiazepines or amphetamines) or other substances, it can be pretty risky and unsafe for your kids. There might be lots of people coming and going who don't always act safely around your children.

1. Keep alcohol, drugs and needles or syringes locked away safely where kids can't get to them.
2. Don't store drugs or alcohol in food or drinking containers. They can make your kids really sick.
3. If people are using drugs or alcohol, make sure there's a sober, drug-free adult around – someone you can trust to look out for your kids and who your kids feel safe with.
4. Talk to older kids about your drug or alcohol use. Have an "Emergency" (Step 5) and "Care" (Step 7) plan in case a parent or carer gets sick or collapses.
5. Get help if your alcohol or drug use is getting out of hand.



parent tips



families who don't have a phone

If you don't have a phone at your place, it can be very hard for a child to get help in an emergency or if they feel scared.



1. Find the nearest public phone and make sure your children know where it is and how to use it.
2. Make sure there is always the right money or a phone card with credit on it in a good spot at home.
3. Ask a trusted neighbour if your children can go to them for help or use their phone if needed. Put their name on your family's "Emergency Contacts" list (Step 5).

parent tips





families who live out bush

If you live out bush, you or your kids could be a long way from help when it's needed. Who would you call on? Where could your kids get help in an emergency? What's special about your family and situation that might be different from people living closer to town?

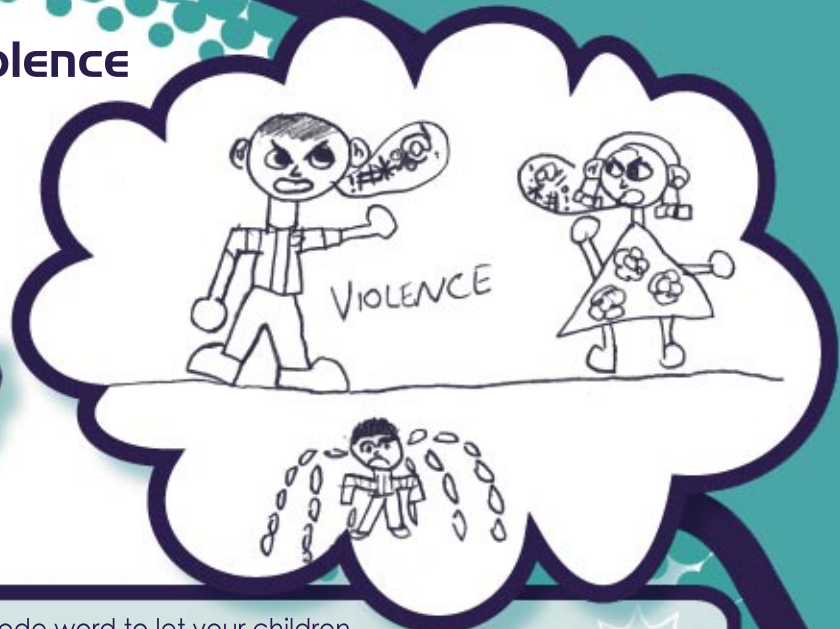
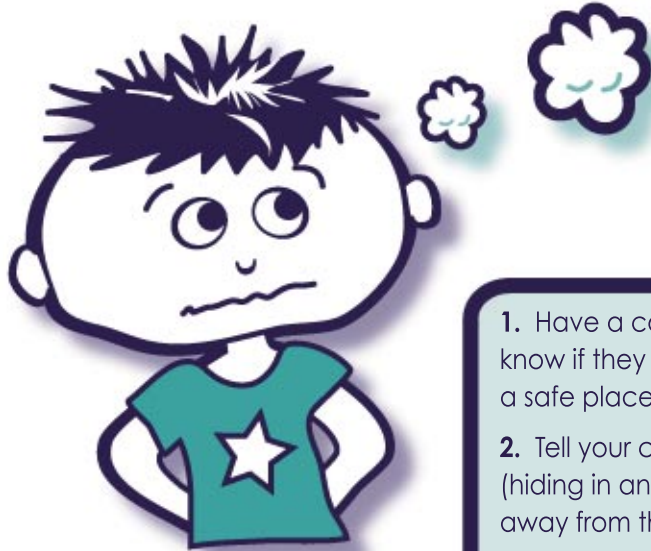
1. If you use a radio for communication, teach your children how to use it.
2. Make sure your kids know how to tell people how to get to your place. Draw a map with them and include the nearest roads and landmarks. Keep it with your "Emergency Contacts" list (Step 5).
3. Enrol your kids (and yourself) in a First Aid course.
4. Think about who your children would contact about a bushfire, or even a snake in the house. Include their details on your "Emergency Contacts" list (Step 5).
5. Teach your kids what to do to stay safe both with bush and domestic animals.
6. Fence off an area near the house for kids to play safely away from machinery, animals and dams or pools.



parent tips

families where there is violence

If there is violence in your family, then you need to work out the **SAFEST** thing your children can do to get help, especially if someone is being hurt. Using your home phone to call police might not be the safest thing to do.



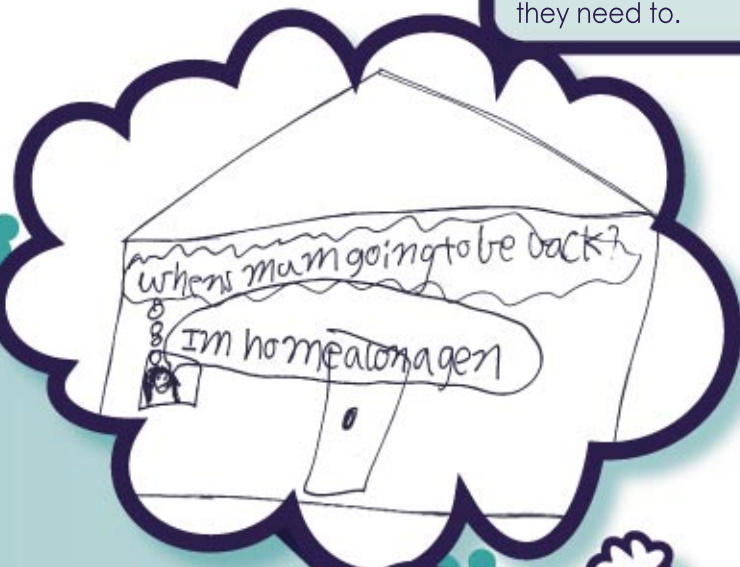
1. Have a code word to let your children know if they have to get out of the house quickly to a safe place.
2. Tell your children **NOT** to try to help someone in a fight (hiding in another room might be best). If there is a phone away from the fight, ring **000** and tell them what's happening.
3. Tell your children to go to a safe place if possible (e.g. a trusted neighbour) and ask for help.
4. Tell your children it's OK to talk to someone else afterwards if they need to.



parent tips

families where children are sometimes left on their own

If there are times when your children are left alone to supervise themselves, there are a number of things you can do to make sure they are ready, safe and confident.



1. Take a look at **Step 6: Ready Yet?**, for information, tips and "Family Activities" to help you work out if your kids are ready to be left home on their own.
2. If you have to leave your kids at home, make sure they know how to stay safe and who they can contact if they feel scared or worried (Steps 3, 5, 6).
3. Make some "Family Rules" (Step 2) to help your children make safe decisions.



parent tips

families where a child has an intellectual or developmental delay, a mental health issue or a physical illness or disability

Children with an intellectual or developmental delay, a mental health issue or a physical illness or disability may live with carers full time or for family respite, and may have challenging behaviours.

Some children may find it difficult to distinguish between or control “safe” and potentially “risky” activities or behaviours. Such children can be at risk of sexual or physical abuse, and might lack the confidence, verbal or physical ability to stop what is happening. They might also not know how to communicate what has happened to other people.



1. Make a list of any special things your family and child need to manage everyday life. This can help you work out any extra support you might need.

2. Know where you can get practical or emotional support if needed. Try to have a range of people who can support your family (e.g. support group, disability association, friends or family, school, Department of Health and Community Services). Call Carers NT on **1800 242 636** (toll free) to find out about carer support and respite services in your area.

3. Check your family is up-to-date with First Aid, manual handling techniques and other safety issues, and that all family members know what sort of “emergency” could happen and what to do. Take a look at **Step 3: Feel Safe with People** and **Step 5: Emergency**.

4. Make sure you have people on your child’s “Helper Plan” (Step 3) and “Emergency Contacts” list (Step 5) who your child trusts, and work out the best way for your child to contact them if needed.

5. Use ideas from **Step 3: Feel Safe with People** to help your child learn about what’s safe and unsafe behaviour. Think of examples relevant to your child’s situation. Talk about and practise them.

6. Make sure any people on your child’s “Care Plan” (Step 7) can manage medications or handle equipment such as wheelchairs. List these requirements on your child’s “Care Plan”.



parent tips

families who have recently arrived in Australia

If you've recently come to Australia, you might find the laws and responsibilities around children are different from your home country. It might be hard to work out how to fit your past world and new world together, especially if your children are turning away from your traditional ways. Settling in your new country can be challenging and lonely.

In Australia the adults in a family are expected to look out for their own children. The Northern Territory has laws that protect children under 18 years. Adult family members must provide children with adequate food, clothing, housing, health, education and a safe place to live. The law also gives children rights and protections in relation to "medical" interventions such as female "circumcision", sterilisation or abortion, and the age at which children can engage in sexual activity (16 years).



1. Join a relevant community group for support or advice about "settling in" issues or any cultural or safety concerns.

2. Talk to people about how others have coped with mixing their cultural way with Australian cultural ways. Ask them what changes you might need to make about how you look out for your children, especially little ones.

3. If you want others to share in looking after your children, you need to work it out so you know your children are safe. Try to find ways to connect with other families to support each other.

4. If your children ride a bicycle, make sure they wear a helmet and shoes and are "street wise" to watching out for vehicles, people, driveways and intersections. Encourage them to learn the road rules.

5. For an interpreter, call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on **131 450**.



parent tips

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Territory children whose drawings and comments contributed to the development of **7 Steps to Safety**. Particular thanks goes to Kidsafe NT and the many other Northern Territory service providers for their initial and ongoing consultation, advice and feedback. We would like to acknowledge the experience and expertise of the service providers who contributed directly to this Step.

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 Moyer. 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

7 Steps to Safety aims to promote the safety and wellbeing of children. Material contained in the kit is intended for information purposes and cannot be taken as legal or medical advice.

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