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TOP TIPS FOR CHILD SAFETY AT HOME

BY KITTY WERNER

Child safety in cars often makes national headlines. But what about child safety in your home? The curiosity of a toddler is astounding and their ability to climb, crawl, totter, and tilt their way into situations adults cannot imagine knows no bounds.

You can protect your young child — or young visitors to your home — by instituting these key safety measures.

1. YOU GOTTA CRAWL BEFORE YOU CAN WALK

From the moment we stand up for the first time, we want to “be big.” Which means we quickly forget what the world looks like when you’re only two-and-a-half feet tall and crawling on all fours. But taking the time to do just this can be a real eye-opener for a parent. Suddenly those uncovered wall outlets become objects of wonder, the soap under the kitchen sink an endless source of fun, and the wastebasket a treasure trove.

As you crawl around your home, imagine what you could pull on — a lamp cord, a vase full of flowers, a tablecloth — that could bring something sharp or heavy down on your unprotected head. How easily can you open the refrigerator at this level? What about drawers and cabinets? Pet food bowls?

Remember, toddlers believe the whole world is a playground created just for them. Your job is to make it as safe as you possibly can. Getting down to your child’s level will give you the perspective you need to do this.

2. BAR THE MEDICINE CABINET DOOR

Careful storage of prescription medications is good for your children as well as the medications themselves (store in a cool, dry place). First choice for storage of medicines of all types — aspirin, vitamins, laxatives, and cold remedies included — is way up high where children cannot reach. The optimum storage facility for medicines is a locked cabinet up high.

While we’re talking about medicines, take a good look around your bathroom at your personal care products such as powder, deodorants, shampoos, and make-up. Make sure that they are safely stored as well in a child-proof cabinet, closet or drawer.

3. PROMINENTLY POST YOUR POISON CONTROL HOTLINE NUMBER

Take a few minutes to open your phone book and find the number for your local poison control center. In some cases, it will be listed in the opening pages along with other emergency and social service agency numbers.. Sometimes, the number is listed in the white pages under “Poison.” If you can’t find your local number in either of these two places, call your local police’s non-emergency number and ask them how to contact your local poison control center.

Write this number down so that you can see it without your glasses and tape it to the wall next to your phone. You don’t want to be fumbling for this information right after your child has swallowed ten chocolate flavored laxatives. This would also be a good time



to purchase a small bottle of Ipecac syrup to induce vomiting if that's the advice you get from the poison control folks. Caution: never use Ipecac syrup unless instructed to do so by poison control personnel.

4. INSTALL CHILDPROOF LOCKS ON ALL DOORS AND DRAWERS

Before you buy these impediments to destruction, check out several brands to be sure you're getting kid-stoppers that really work. Even if a drawer contains nothing dangerous to your child, put a lock on it anyway. More than one toddler has pulled out drawers to make a handy ladder to reach the top of a refrigerator, kitchen counter or stove. And while you're in the childproofing section of the store, buy enough electric receptacle covers to make sure your toddler doesn't have any open outlets to poke into.

5. LEAD PAINT

If your home was built before 1978, there's a chance you have lead paint on the walls. This toxic wallcovering tastes sweet and chips of it can entice your toddler. Ingested lead paint causes brain damage.

If you're purchasing an older home, ask for certification that the house is lead-free. If it isn't, the lead must be safely removed or encapsulated. Do not attempt to do this yourself. Inhaling lead dust won't do you any good at all.

6. COVER POOLS AND HOT TUBS

Every vigilant adult can testify that kids have a habit of wandering into potential danger when you least expect it. And what's more attractive to a toddler than a great big puddle? Install a high fence around your pool to keep out uninvited children or pets at all times. Cover your hot tub with a top too heavy for a child to lift when it's not in use. And make sure any electric lines or plugs are out of a child's reach as well.

7. INSTALL GROUND FAULT CIRCUIT INTERRUPTERS

GFCI's work like this: let's say you're washing dishes in the kitchen sink while listening to a nearby radio and you accidentally pull the radio's cord and it lands in the water. If you don't have that radio plugged into a GFCI outlet, you'll receive a life-threatening shock. If you do have a GFCI installed, it will detect a power surge and cut the electricity immediately, most likely saving your (or your child's) life.

GFCI's are available at hardware stores and are easily installed. First, shut off the breaker to the outlet you're going to replace. (Make sure you have the right one by plugging something in to be sure the outlet is not functioning.) Unscrew and pull out the old receptacle being careful not to undo the wires on the back of it. Examine the back of the GFCI and the outlet you're replacing. Their color coding is identical. One by one, take the wires off the old receptacle, carefully replacing each one with the same color wire on the GFCI unit. When you're all done, push the GFCI unit into place, screw it in, re-install the outlet's cover plate, and remember to turn the breaker back on.

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