Tips for Keeping Children Safe: A Developmental Guide

During the first five years, children constantly acquire new skills and knowledge. Caregivers who know what children can do and how they can get hurt can protect them from injury.¹

All children develop differently. Staff individualize their approach because "children have different rates of development as well as individual interests, temperaments, languages, cultural backgrounds and learning styles." Ongoing child assessment helps staff determine each child's developmental level.

This tool provides safety tips for early childhood staff working with young children in classroom environments. Each section includes a description of development and safety tips organized by daily routines. Some tips apply to all children. Others address the developmental needs of children in a specific age group. If children in your classroom fit more than one developmental level, review the safety tips for each.

Center-based programs can use this tool to:

- 1. Educate staff about safe practices during daily routines with children of all developmental stages
- 2. Explain the reasons for specific safety measures
- 3. Provide an easy reference guide to help staff prevent injuries

Using the Tool

Select the tab that corresponds to the developmental stage of the children you serve. Then choose a daily routine to see a list of safety tips, including a description of "what to do" and "why it works." For a printable version, select the "print" button on the upper right hand corner of your screen. When the print window appears, choose "PDF" from the upper left corner.

- Young Infants
- Mobile Infants
- Toddlers
- Preschoolers

Young Infants

Infants depend on their caregivers for food, warmth, and care, and for meeting such basic needs as eating, diapering, sleeping, and bonding. But all babies are unique. Some infants may settle easily and be capable of quickly soothing themselves. Others may cry often or for long periods of time. In order to thrive, infants need nurturing, consistent, caring, and responsive caregivers. A caregiver develops a responsive relationship with an infant by responding to the baby's cries, coos, and other communication attempts and providing what the infant needs. Responsive caregiving or relationships is at the heart of young children's development. The architecture of their brain is literally shaped by every single experience they have. Read More about Young Infants

During the first months of life, a young infant's neck is not strong enough to support the weight of his or her head.

Infant caregivers support a baby's early movements by gently holding and positioning the infant's body, head, and neck to prevent injury. Caregivers also provide a safe space for young infants to participate in supervised "tummy time." This gives them a chance to build the muscles they need to hold up their neck, control the movement of their arms and legs, roll over (4–6 months), sit up (7–9 months), and eventually get ready for crawling, cruising, and walking. Young infants also begin to roll over and sometimes move in unexpected ways. Caregivers need to supervise them closely to prevent falls, the leading cause of unintentional, nonfatal injury among all children ages birth to 5. In addition, they begin to grasp objects and need to have access to materials that are safe so that there is no risk of choking.

Infants' feeding skills evolve as they mature. At first they are only able to suck and swallow liquids. Over time, they gain more control of their tongue and mouth, which allows them to begin to eat pureed and strained food from a spoon. Caregivers talk with families to determine what foods and feeding styles best meet the needs of their child, and they observe infants carefully when feeding them. Conversations about food are respectful of the family's culture and food traditions and support safe and culturally responsive feeding practices.

Young infants are constantly reacting to the world around them. Brightly colored objects, toys that make noises, and soothing music may stimulate or calm babies. Caregivers observe their reaction to different types and levels of stimulation—through sights, sounds, and touch—and respond by providing a nurturing and safe environment with enough stimulation to meet each child's needs and interests. "Remember with all babies—timing and match are important! (Your) job . . . is to recognize (a) baby's natural tendencies, meet her where she is at, and then provide the external support she needs to handle the stimulation that is naturally at the heart of everyday interactions with her caregivers and the world around her."²

²Gouley, K. K. (n.d.). Stimulation and development during Infancy: Tuning in to your baby's cues. Retrieved from The Child Study Center of the NYU Langone Medical Center website: Stimulation and Development During Infancy: Tuning in to Your Baby's Cues

CLOSE

All Daily Routines

Safety Tip No. 1: Actively supervise

What to do:

Closely observe and supervise young infants so you can see and reach them at all times. Active supervision includes these six strategies:

- Set up the environment
- Position staff
- Scan and count
- Listen
- Anticipate children's behavior
- Engage and redirect

Why it works:

Infants change constantly and continually demonstrate new interests and abilities. Caregivers who use active supervision strategies are able to respond to each infant's individual needs by paying close attention and anticipating and removing potential hazards. Active supervision in classrooms with multi-age groupings is an important strategy to ensure the safety of children at different stages of development.

Safety Tip No. 2: Create safe environments

What to do:

Set up the indoor space with age-appropriate furniture so that young infants are able to explore their environment safely. Arrange furniture so that staff have a clear line of vision and can actively supervise [PDF, 93KB] infants at all times. Make sure that furnishings do not have sharp corners or flaking paint, and that there are no dangling cords. Provide a separate area for "tummy time" for young infants, away from play areas for mobile infants.

In outdoor environments, offer soft surfacing, such as a blanket. Use the shade of a tree, stroller canopy, or umbrella to protect young infants from direct sunlight.

Why it works:

Furniture that is waist-high allows caregivers to see and hear everything that is happening in the room, whether they are sitting or standing. All furnishings should be in good condition and properly secured. Setting aside a special area for "tummy time" that is not in the direct path of a mobile infant protects younger infants from injury.

All children need opportunities to play and explore outside as well as inside. Exposure to the sights, sounds, and experiences of their outdoor environment supports child development in all domains.3 However, caregivers working with young infants need to take specific measures to ensure that outdoor experiences are positive and safe. Shade and appropriate clothing are the best sun protection for young infants.

Safety Tip No. 3: Maintain safe environments

What to do:

Before every use of furniture and equipment, conduct safety inspections on indoor and outdoor environments and remove any hazards.

Why it works:

Infants need safe places to learn and grow. When caregivers use a safety checklist [PDF, 404KB] to perform environmental safety checks that match a child's level of development, they are able to identify possible hazards and remove or repair any objects that could injure an infant.

Safety Tip No. 4: Store and lock poisonous products

What to do:

Place all cleaning products, other chemicals, medications, and classroom materials that could be harmful to infants in locked cabinets out of their reach. Store staff coats, purses, and bags in closets or outside the classroom.

Why it works:

Young infants learn about their environment by exploring objects using all of their senses. Infants who can reach a cleaning product can put it in their mouth, inhale it, or spill it on their skin. The chemicals can poison or burn them. When caregivers store toxic products in locked cabinets and keep personal items out of children's reach, they cannot pose a threat to young infants.

³Thigpen, B. (2007). Outdoor Play: Combating Sedentary Lifestyles. *ZERO TO THREE, 28*(1), 19–23.

Diapering and Toileting

Safety Tip No. 1: Stay "hands on" and engaged

What to do:

To prevent falls, keep a hand on young infants whenever they are on a changing table or other raised surface. Engaging infants in reciprocal play, such as singing, rhyming, and echoing verbalizations, helps keep them safe and provides opportunities for learning.

Why it works:

Young infants are constantly exploring what their bodies can do. They may wiggle their arms or legs, thrust them onto the changing pad, attempt to roll over, or scoot forward or backward. Because their movements may be unpredictable, staying hands on can prevent an infant from falling off a changing table or other high surface. In addition, providing a positive, engaging activity during diapering fosters a nurturing relationship, creates learning opportunities, and helps prevent injuries by focusing a child's attention during diapering.

Safety Tip No. 2: Store diapering supplies safely

What to do:

Keep topical medications for rashes and skin conditions and diapering ointments within easy reach of the caregiver but away from a child's grasp. Disinfect diapering areas after each use. Wait until children have left the area to prevent exposing them to the chemicals in these products. Follow your state licensing regulations when storing disinfecting solutions. Find more information about diaper changing procedures in *Caring for Our Children* from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (CFOC).⁴

Why it works:

Diapering areas may contain medications or ointments for diaper rash or other skin conditions in addition to disinfectant supplies. Young infants try to grasp objects. As they grow, they are more able to pick up and mouth any materials that are within their reach. A young infant may try to grab spray bottles, disinfectant wipes, ointments, medications, or other harmful materials that are close to the diaper changing area and put them in his or her mouth. Thoughtful placement of these items is necessary to prevent children from touching them.

⁴American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, & National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2011). *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards guidelines for early care and education programs*(3rd ed.).Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved from http://nrckids.org

Feeding

Safety Tip No. 1: Check food temperatures

What to do:

When bottle feeding, CFOC recommends serving bottles cold from the refrigerator or placing them "under running, warm tap water or in a container of water that is no warmer than 120 degrees" for five minutes to warm them. CFOC offers detailed instructions on warming bottles and infant food and on preparing, feeding, and storing human milk.

Why it works:

Infants' mouths are particularly sensitive to temperature and may scald if liquids are too hot. Microwaves do not heat liquids evenly and can lead to scalding. Using a bottle warmer or placing a bottle in warm water is safer and more effective.⁵

Safety Tip No. 2: Position children to eat safely

What to do:

Hold infants who are bottle feeding securely and make sure they are able to breathe freely through their nose. Once an infant is able to sit up and eat strained food, use a feeding chair with secure straps.

Why it works:

Infants breathe through their nose when they eat, so their nasal passages need to be clear to accept a bottle. Hold an infant who is bottle feeding securely. For an infant who is able to sit up and eat strained food, use a chair that is low to the ground with high sides and secure straps to reduce the risk of injury from a fall.

Safety Tip No. 3: Choose age-appropriate foods

What to do:

When infants are ready to eat food from a spoon, consult with families and introduce age-appropriate, culturally responsive foods. Make sure that all food is strained or pureed. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that infants from 4–7 months be offered only strained fruits and vegetables and iron-fortified cereal. USDA guidelines [PDF, 44KB] offer important information about meal patterns and infant feeding.

Why it works:

A baby's throat is small and easily obstructed. Young infants are still learning how to control their tongue, chew, and swallow. As infants grow, they gain more control over their ability to move food around in their mouth and are able to eat strained and pureed food without choking. *The Sequence of Infant Development and Feeding Skills in Normal, Healthy Full-Term Infants* from the USDA's Feeding Infants: A Guide for Use in the Child Nutrition Programs [PDF, 1.8MB] is a helpful chart for understanding foods that are safe for children at different developmental stages.

⁵Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). Proper handling and storage of human milk. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling_breastmilk.htm

Napping

Safety Tip No. 1: Use safe cribs

What to do:

Use the new U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) federal safety regulations to protect infants from injury, suffocation, or strangulation in a crib. **Drop-side cribs do not meet current safety regulations. Programs are not permitted to use them.** In addition, programs must help families locate replacements for drop-side cribs.

Why it works:

As young infants begin to move their bodies, they can put themselves into dangerous positions. While lying on their backs, they may push or wiggle themselves into the side of a crib. They may also slide their arms through the slats in a crib and wedge themselves into positions that could injure them. Using safe cribs prevents injuries to young infants.

Safety Tip No. 2: Use safe sleep practices

What to do:

It is important to employ safe sleep practices [PDF, 3.76MB]. Always place young infants on their backs to sleep, without blankets and toys that could cover a child's mouth or nose. Use a firm mattress and a tight-fitting sheet. Share CPSC recommendations with families that "bare is best" in sleeping arrangements for infants and that it's safer not to use bumpers in a crib.

Why it works:

Young infants develop the ability to flip their heads and bodies as they grow. Until they are able to control how their muscles move, they are at risk for suffocation and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Caregivers can reduce this risk by placing infants on their backs in cribs without toys, pillows, or loose blankets.

Play

Safety Tip No. 1: Use equipment and materials that are safe for infants and have no small parts

What to do:

Select equipment that is appropriate for infants so there is nothing that can trap a child's head or limbs. Ensure that strollers are appropriate for the height and weight of the children. Choose play mats, swings, rockers, carriers and other equipment that accommodate infants' height and weight restrictions. Always use safety straps to secure infants so they cannot fall.

Regularly inspect materials and equipment to identify, remove, or repair any objects that may cause injury. Only provide toys that are safe for infants, and place heavier toys on the bottom shelves. Keep all objects that are small enough to fit into an infant's mouth out of reach. Make sure that materials and equipment, including dolls and stuffed animals, do not have loose, small parts that could fall off and pose a choking hazard. Any object that can pass through the small-parts cylinder (2.25 inches long by 1.25 inches wide) used for screening choking hazards [PDF, 31KB] for children younger than 3 years is too small for infant play.

For more information, see ASTM Toy Test Equipment Small Parts Cylinder [PDF, 31KB] and Which Toy for Which Child: A Consumer's Guide for Selecting Suitable Toys [PDF, 1.1MB].

Why it works:

Age-appropriate equipment prevents injuries from entrapment. Safety straps secure a child in a stroller, swing, rocker, carrier, or other equipment and reduce the risk of falls. Routine inspections of materials and equipment eliminate potential hazards. Placing heavier objects on lower shelves reduces the likelihood of injury from a dropped toy.

Young infants are becoming more aware of their environment. They use their hands and mouths to explore. As soon as an infant is capable of grasping objects, a baby may try to grasp an object within reach and bring it to his or her mouth. Providing toys and materials that contain no small or loose parts eliminates choking hazards.

To sign up for recall notices from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, visit their website at http://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/Subscribe/.

Mobile Infants

Mobile infants are developing more control of their head, torso, arms, and legs, and are beginning to coordinate those movements. They sleep less and are more active during the day, eager to engage in everything around them. As they learn to stand, crawl, cruise, and walk, they are able to move around more independently and explore their environment. Mobile infants are developing their ability to reach for objects. They may suddenly grab, chew, or try to climb on objects that were once out of their reach. Caregivers inspect each setting children use to make sure there are no indoor or outdoor areas, materials, or equipment that could be unsafe.⁶Read More about Mobile Infants

Mobile infants are curious and learn by doing. They use sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell to learn about the objects in their environment. Their brains are developing rapidly as they begin to understand who and what is in their world. They begin to recognize routines, and they are learning that people may leave and return later. As they become aware that objects still exist even when they are hidden, they engage in play to practice this new

knowledge. Cabinets, toy chests, and other items that open and close become more intriguing. They watch where you place objects, and they may try to go and get them; so active supervision is an important injury-prevention strategy.

They are able to swallow semisolid food and eventually begin to feed themselves solid food. Choosing and preparing age-appropriate, culturally responsive foods that do not pose a choking hazard results in safe feeding practices.

Mobile infants also vocalize more. They begin to respond to simple requests and one-step directions, such as "time to sit" or "may not." This sets the stage for learning healthy habits and safety rules as children grow.

Mobile infants are eager to practice their new skills and learn from the people, places, and things in their environments. Depending on their temperament, some infants are cautious while others are more likely to take risks. Caregivers create safe environments for mobile infants to explore and know how to individualize for each child.

⁶Early Head Start National Resource Center. (n.d.). *Serving mobile infants*. Retrieved from Serving Mobile Infants: Sharing Knowledge with Infant—Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors [PDF, 698KB].

CLOSE

All Daily Routines

Safety Tip No. 1: Actively supervise

What to do:

Closely observe and supervise mobile infants so you can see and reach them at all times. Anticipate children's behavior and engage or redirect mobile infants toward safe learning opportunities. Active supervision includes these six strategies:

- Setting up the environment
- Positioning staff
- Scanning and counting
- Listening
- Anticipating children's behavior
- Engaging and redirecting

Why it works:

As infants become mobile, they may suddenly try to climb over or crawl under furniture, out of a crib, or over a child safety gate. Caregivers who use active supervision strategies observe children's behavior and intervene quickly to help them practice their new skills safely.

Safety Tip No. 2: Create safe environments

What to do:

Set up indoor spaces with age-appropriate furniture so mobile infants are able to explore their environment safely. Arrange furniture so that staff have a clear line of vision and can actively supervise [PDF, 93KB] at all times. Placement of Equipment and Furnishings from *Caring for Our Children* from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (CFOC) has additional information. As mobile infants may be pulling to stand and/or trying to climb, secure furniture so it will not tip over. Make sure that furniture is not near a window. Mobile infants will use whatever is available to pull themselves up or to help them move around so they can explore new places. Securing furniture so it cannot tip over or provide access to restricted areas or unsafe items protects children from injury. Mobile infants are beginning to understand that an object does not disappear when it is not in sight, so they are interested in opening and closing items to find hidden objects. It is important to prevent access to any items or areas that could result in injury.

In a mixed-age grouping, provide a separate area for mobile infants to engage in floor activities. This should be away from activities designed for toddlers and from any area set up for "tummy time" for younger infants. Use safety straps to hold mobile infants in swings, rockers, carriers, and other equipment so that they cannot climb into a dangerous position. Use the shade of a tree, stroller canopy, or umbrella to protect mobile infants from excessive exposure to sunlight.

Why it works:

Furniture that is waist-high allows caregivers to see and hear everything that is happening in the room, whether they are sitting or standing. Anchoring furniture prevents injuries to mobile infants. They need to be able to crawl, stand, and walk safely to develop their motor skills. Clearing paths for infants new to walking reduces the risk of injury from falling.

Setting up specific areas within the classroom for different kinds of play allows mobile infants to practice skills safely. For example, establishing a separate area for mobile infants to engage in physical activities protects mobile infants from injuring young infants and active toddlers from injuring newly mobile infants. Shade and appropriate clothing are the best sun protection for mobile infants.

Safety Tip No. 3: Maintain safe environments

What to do:

Before every use, conduct safety inspections on indoor and outdoor environments and remove any hazards. Make sure cabinet locks are working and all outlets have covers.

Why it works:

Mobile infants need safe places to learn and grow. Use a safety checklist [PDF, 1.1MB] to perform environmental safety checks that match a child's level of development. This will help caregivers to identify possible hazards and remove or repair any objects that could injure a mobile infant. Cabinet locks and outlet covers protect mobile infants from injury.

Safety Tip No. 4: Store and lock poisonous products

What to do:

Place all cleaning products, other chemicals, medications, and classroom materials that could be harmful to mobile infants in locked cabinets out of their reach. Store staff coats, purses, and bags in closets or outside the classroom.

Why it works:

Mobile infants are likely to explore all surfaces and cabinets that they can access. They use all of their senses to learn about their environment. Mobile infants who find a bottle of cleaner might put it in their mouth, smell it, or spill it on their skin. They may try to open a medication bottle and take the medication. These actions could poison or burn a child. When caregivers store toxic products in locked cabinets and keep personal items out of children's reach, these products cannot pose a threat to mobile infants.

Diapering and Toileting

Safety Tip No. 1: Stay "hands on" and engaged

To prevent falls, keep a hand on mobile infants whenever they are on a changing table or other raised surface. Engaging mobile infants in reciprocal play such as singing, talking, and echoing helps keep them safe and provides opportunities for learning.

Why it works:

Many mobile infants want to keep moving all of the time. They may try to wriggle free, roll over unexpectedly, or crawl away. These sudden movements could cause an infant to fall from a changing table or other high surface. Keeping a hand on a child at all times prevents him or her from falling. In addition, providing a positive, engaging activity during diapering fosters a nurturing relationship and creates learning opportunities.

Safety Tip No. 2: Store diapering supplies safely

What to do:

Keep topical medications for rashes and skin conditions and diapering ointments within easy reach of the caregiver but away from a child's grasp. Remove children before disinfecting diapering areas after each use to prevent exposing them to the chemicals in these products. Follow your state licensing regulations when storing the disinfecting solution. Find tips from CFOC in the Diaper Changing Procedure.

Why it works:

Diapering areas may contain medications or ointments for diaper rash or other skin conditions in addition to disinfectant supplies. Mobile infants use their hands and mouth to explore their environment. They are now more able to pick up any objects within their reach. Mobile infants may grab spray bottles, disinfectant wipes, ointments, medications, or other harmful materials that are close to the diaper-changing area and put them in their mouths or spill them on their skin. Thoughtful placement of these items is necessary to prevent children from touching them.

Feeding

Safety Tip No. 1: Check food temperature

What to do:

When bottle feeding, CFOC recommends serving bottles cold from the refrigerator or placing them "under running, warm tap water or in a container of water that is no warmer than 120 degrees" for five minutes to warm them.⁷ They also offer detailed instructions on warming bottles and infant food.

Why it works:

Infants' mouths are particularly sensitive to temperature and may burn if liquids are too hot. Microwaves do not heat liquids evenly and can lead to scalding. Using a bottle warmer or placing a bottle in warm water is safer and more effective.⁸

Safety Tip No. 2: Choose age-appropriate foods

What to do:

Mobile infants like to practice self-feeding. First, cut food into small pieces (cubes no larger than 1/4 inch) or thin slices that they can easily chew and swallow.⁹ Avoid high-risk foods such as: small, slippery foods; dry foods that are hard to chew or sticky; and tough foods.¹⁰

For a list of some of these foods, see Foods that Are Choking Hazards from CFOC. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also offers important guidelines for meal patterns and infant feeding [PDF, 59KB].

Why it works:

A baby's throat is small and can be easily obstructed. Growing infants slowly learn how to coordinate their mouths to chew and swallow food. They also grow teeth at varying ages and may not be able to chew certain foods safely. Therefore, it is important to offer foods that will not obstruct their airway if swallowed whole. *The Sequence of Infant Development and Feeding Skills in Normal, Healthy Full-Term Infants* from the USDA's Feeding Infants: A Guide for Use in the Child Nutrition Programs [PDF, 1.8MB] includes feeding milestones and recommendations about when to add semisolid and modified table foods and finger foods.

Safety Tip No. 3: Position children to eat safely

What to do:

Hold infants who are bottle-feeding securely and make sure they are able to breathe freely through their nose. Place mobile infants in a feeding chair that is low to the ground with secure straps and high sides.

Why it works:

Mobile infants breathe through their nose when they eat, so their nasal passages need to be clear to accept a bottle. Hold mobile infants who are bottle-feeding securely. Using a chair that is low to the ground and with high sides reduces an infant's risk of injury from a fall. Mobile infants sit upright in a feeding chair that has a secure strap. Sitting up reduces the likelihood of choking and the strap reduces the risk of injury from a fall.

Safety Tip No. 4: Stay "hands on"

What to do:

Keep a hand on or near a mobile infant to prevent falls from a feeding chair.

Why it works:

Mobile infants love to explore. They may try to push back, climb, or wiggle around when seated in a feeding chair. These movements could cause an infant to fall unless an adult can quickly reach him or her to prevent injury.

⁷American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, & National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2011). *Caring for Our children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs* (3rd ed.). Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved from http://nrckids.org.

⁸Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). Proper Handling and Storage of Human Milk. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling_breastmilk.htm

⁹United States Department of Agriculture. (2002). Choking prevention. In *Feeding Infants: A Guide for Use in the Child Nutrition Programs* [PDF, 1.80MB].

¹⁰Mayo Clinic. (2011, April). Infant Choking: How to Keep Your Baby Safe. Retrieved from Infant Choking: How to Keep Your Baby Safe.

Napping

Safety Tip No. 1: Use safe cribs

What to do:

Programs use the new U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) federal safety regulations to protect infants from injury, suffocation, or strangulation in a crib. **Drop-side cribs do not meet current safety regulations**.

Programs are not permitted to use them. In addition, programs should help families locate replacements for dropside cribs.

Why it works:

Mobile infants may reach their arms through the slats in a crib or put their fingers into places that can pinch or cut them. They may be active during their sleep and wedge themselves in dangerous positions. Therefore, programs must comply with the CPSC guidelines for safe cribs and help families understand crib-related hazards.

Safety Tip No. 2: Use safe sleep practices

What to do:

It is important to employ safe sleep practices [PDF, 3.76MB]. Place mobile infants on their backs, without blankets and toys that could cover the child's mouth or nose. The crib should have a firm mattress and a tight-fitting sheet. Share CPSC recommendations with families about not using bumper pads and lowering the crib mattress to its lowest position as soon as their child can stand.

Why it works:

Mobile infants begin to roll around, crawl, and stand in their cribs, often moving around as they sleep. A blanket, pillow, or toy can cover or trap a sleeping child. Eliminating toys, pillows, and loose blankets from cribs and sleeping spaces prevents suffocation. Children may also try to climb up the sides of the crib to get out. Eliminating bumper pads and lowering the crib mattress reduces the risk of children climbing out of the crib.

Play

Safety Tip No. 1: Use equipment and materials that are safe for mobile infants and have no small parts

What to do:

Select equipment that is appropriate for mobile infants so there is nothing that can trap their heads or limbs. Ensure that strollers are appropriate for the height and weight of the children. Choose play mats, swings, rockers, carriers, and other equipment that accommodate height and weight restrictions. Always use safety straps to secure mobile infants so they cannot fall.

Regularly inspect materials and equipment to identify and remove or repair any objects that could injure a mobile infant. Only provide toys that are safe for mobile infants, and place heavier toys on the bottom shelves. State child care licensure websites and child care resource and referral agencies have lists of specifications that determine appropriateness, as dictated by each state. Regularly monitor the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's website for recalls through http://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/Subscribe/.

Keep all objects out of reach that are small enough to fit into an infant's mouth. Make sure that materials and equipment, including dolls and stuffed animals, do not have loose, small parts that could fall off and pose a choking hazard. Any object that can pass through the small-parts cylinder (2.25 inches long by 1.25 inches wide) used for screening choking hazards for children younger than 3 years is too small for use by mobile infants. For more information, see ASTM toy test equipment small parts cylinder [PDF, 31KB] and Which Toy for Which Child: A Consumer's Guide for Selecting Suitable Toys [PDF, 1.2MB].

Why it works:

With their greater mobility, older infants are excited about exploring their physical environment. Most babies do not have a sense of danger or caution, and they benefit from equipment and materials designed to reduce the risk of injury. Age-appropriate equipment prevents injuries from entrapment. Safety straps secure a child in a stroller,

swing, rocker, carrier, or other equipment and reduce the risk of falls. Placing heavier objects on lower shelves reduces the likelihood of injury from a dropped toy.

By the time they are 9 months old, many mobile infants have the hand-eye coordination and small muscle control needed to pick up objects and transfer them from hand to hand. Infants are curious learners and use their hands and mouths to explore. As a result, they will put anything they can reach into their mouth. Removing unsafe objects from the environment prevents a child from choking on them.

Toddlers

The toddler years are a time when children are building skills in all areas. They remember what they learn and share it with others. They understand things more deeply, make choices, and engage with others in new ways. The changes in their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development help them to build new skills that prepare them for school and later learning. Read More about Toddlers

During the toddler years, children begin to use their large and small muscles in new ways. They like to go fast and practice running, jumping, kicking, and throwing. Although unsteady at first, with practice, many children begin to climb stairs by the time they reach age 2. By 2-and-a-half, most toddlers have generally mastered stairs and are ready to begin climbing more challenging playground equipment. But as their mobility increases, so do the safety hazards. Caregivers need to supervise their activity closely, especially when toddlers are climbing. As for children of all ages, playground surfacing in outdoor play areas must meet regulations so that it cushions toddlers' many falls. Safety gates are another important piece of safety equipment for children in this age group.

Toddlers move from mouthing things within their reach (at 1 year old) to using their fingers and hands to manipulate objects (at 2-and-a-half years and older). They also are learning more about their environment. For example, they continue to learn that a hidden object is not permanently gone, remember things that happened, sort things by characteristics, and use language to describe what they experience. They explore their world through their imaginations and the games they play. Yet, all learning requires some level of risk. Until they understand what is safe, a toddler may take risks that can lead to injury. Toddler caregivers remove all hazards from the environment and teach children how to explore and engage in activities safely so they can take advantage of the many learning opportunities that are available.

Toddlers also are learning how to play with other children, but they have little ability to share. They lack the language skills to easily express their feelings. As a result, they depend on trusted adults to teach them how to play with other children, share and take turns, and model how to interact safely with both children and adults. Consistent routines and clear expectations help to reduce the risk of challenging behaviors that may result in injuries both to other children and to adults.

CLOSE

All Daily Routines

Safety Tip No. 1: Actively supervise

What to do:

Closely watch and engage toddlers. Redirect them to ensure safe learning opportunities. Caregivers use the six active supervision strategies with toddlers at all times:

- Set up the environment
- Position staff
- Scan and count

- Listen
- Anticipate children's behavior
- Engage and redirect

Why it works:

Toddlers are curious; and with their increasing mobility, they are eager to try new things. They have a hard time waiting and controlling their behavior. Many will climb, run, and jump without caution. They do not understand the concept of "personal space" and often are not able to judge distances appropriately. Caregivers use active supervision strategies to observe their behavior and anticipate and redirect them when necessary to make sure that their play is safe.

Safety Tip No. 3: Create safe environments

What to do:

Set up indoor and outdoor spaces in a way that allows toddlers to stay safe. Securing furniture so it cannot tip over or provide access to restricted areas or unsafe items protects children from injury. Arrange furniture so that staff have a clear line of vision and can actively supervise [PDF, 93KB] toddlers at all times. Refer to Placement of Equipment and Furnishings from *Caring for Our Children* from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (CFOC) for additional information. Create centers or zones for specific purposes, like reading, science, cozy areas, and floor play, away from areas designated for active play. Ensure there is enough space around bookshelves to allow a toddler to take items on and off shelves and play with them. Use safety locks and gates.

Outside, use playground equipment and surfacing that are appropriate for toddlers. See page seven of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) Public Playground Safety Handbook [PDF, 1.2MB] for details.

Why it works:

Toddlers will climb or jump over whatever is in their way to get to something they want. Anchoring furniture prevents injuries. To practice their motor skills, toddlers need to be able to climb, walk, run, and jump safely. Designating specific areas within the classroom for different kinds of play, such as gross motor activity, allows toddlers to practice their motor skills without injuring other children. Furniture that is waist high allows caregivers to see and hear everything that is happening in a room, whether they are sitting or standing. In addition, caregivers actively supervise children to ensure that toddlers use play spaces safely, especially if the group includes young and/or mobile infants.

Outdoor play spaces for toddlers have play structures that are appropriate for their size and developing skills. These structures are lower to the ground and have wider, more moderate steps than preschool play structures; they also have gradual inclines to ensure that toddlers can run, jump, and climb safely.

Safety Tip No. 3: Maintain safe environments

What to do:

Before every use, conduct safety inspections on indoor and outdoor environments and remove any hazards. Make sure cabinet locks are working and all outlets have covers.

Why it works:

Toddlers are eager to try new things all of the time. Young toddlers still may put things in their mouths. Cabinet locks and outlet covers prevent access to unsafe objects. When caregivers use a safety checklist [PDF, 404KB] to perform safety checks on indoor and outdoor environments, they are able to identify possible hazards and remove or repair any objects that could injure a toddler.

Safety Tip No. 4: Store and lock poisonous products

What to do:

Place cleaning products, medications, classroom materials, and other toxic products in locked cabinets out of toddlers' reach. Store staff coats, purses, and bags in closets or outside the classroom.

Why it works:

Toddlers can climb and access objects that were once out of reach. Toddlers who find a bottle of chemicals or medication are likely to try to taste it. These actions could poison the child. Storing all poisons in a locked area and keeping personal belongings out of reach protect children from injury.

Diapering and Toileting

Safety Tip No. 1: Stay "hands on" and engaged

What to do:

To prevent falls, keep a hand on toddlers at all times when they are on a raised surface, such as a changing table. Engaging active toddlers in reciprocal play such as singing, rhyming, and echoing verbalizations keeps them safe and provides learning opportunities. For toddlers that are not yet toilet training, provide safe ways for them to climb onto or off of changing tables.

Why it works:

During diapering, toddlers may try to climb on or off of the changing table, so staying hands on prevents injuries. Teaching toddlers how to safely climb onto or off of a changing table supports their independence. In addition, providing a positive, engaging activity during diapering fosters a nurturing relationship, creates learning opportunities, and prevents injuries by focusing a child's attention during diapering.

Safety Tip No. 2: Store diapering supplies safely

What to do:

Keep topical medications for rashes and skin conditions and diapering ointments within easy reach of the caregiver but away from a child's grasp. Remove children before disinfecting diapering areas after each use to prevent exposing them to the chemicals in these products. Follow state licensing regulations when storing the disinfecting solution.

Why it works:

With a toddler's growing curiosity and greater reach, thoughtful placement of disinfectants, medications, and ointments is necessary. Toddlers will look for and want to touch any materials that are within their grasp. Many of the items close to the diaper-changing area—spray bottles, disinfectant wipes, medications, ointments, or other materials containing toxic ingredients—can burn or poison a child who has contact with them. These products are not safe for toddler exploration.

Meal Times

Safety Tip No. 1: Check Food Temperatures

What to do:

Serve food that is lukewarm or cool after is it properly cooked. Suggestions for safe preparation and serving of food are available from Safe Food for Children: Preventing Foodborne Illness in Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes [PDF, 270KB].

Why it works:

Toddlers' mouths are particularly sensitive to temperature, and burns may affect what and how much a toddler is willing to eat. Additionally, most toddlers grow their canine teeth and molars from 13–33 months.11 When these new teeth come in, toddlers may have particularly sensitive mouths and experience more pain from food that is too hot. Foods that have been properly prepared to a safe temperature and then cooled quickly will be easier for toddlers to eat and will prevent any possible food-borne illness.

Safety Tip No. 2: Choose age-appropriate foods

What to do:

Choose culturally responsive foods and cut them into small pieces (cubes no larger than one-half inch) to prevent choking. Avoid all high-risk foods. These include small, slippery foods, dry foods that are hard to chew or sticky, and tough foods.

Why it works:

A toddler's throat is small and can be easily obstructed. Toddlers are still learning how to coordinate their mouths to fully chew and swallow food. They also grow teeth at varying rates and may not be able to chew or break down certain foods. Therefore, it is safest to feed toddlers foods that they can easily break apart and swallow whole.

Safety Tip No. 3: Position children for safe eating

What to do:

Toddlers sit in tables and chairs that are appropriate for their age and size.

Why it works:

Furniture that is low to the ground minimizes the risk of injury from falls.

Safety Tip No. 4: Teach toddlers how to eat safely

What to do:

Teach toddlers how to feed themselves, including how to use a child-sized fork, spoon, and cup safely. Observe children closely to make sure they do not put too much food into their mouths at once.

Why it works:

Toddlers are becoming more independent and can feed themselves using child-sized cups, spoons, and forks with blunt points. Caregivers observe children to make sure their behavior does not result in a choking hazard. For more information regarding self-feeding, read Encouraging Self-Feeding by Older Infants and Toddlers.

¹¹Strengthening Families: Resources for Partnering for Healthy Development of Children and Youth. (n.d.). Tooth eruption chart. Retrieved from the University of South Carolina School of Medicine website: http://uscm.med.sc.edu/oralhealth/oralhealthp1_files/page0010.htm.

Napping

Safety Tip No. 1: Use safe cribs (for younger toddlers)

What to do:

Programs use the new U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) federal safety regulations to protect children from injury, suffocation, or strangulation in a crib. Drop-side cribs do not meet current safety regulations. Programs are not permitted to use them. The guidelines from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

(CPSC) ensure that toddlers are not at risk of injury or strangulation in a crib. **Drop-side cribs do not meet current safety regulations. Programs must replace them.** If young toddlers are trying to climb from the crib, evaluate their readiness for a cot.

Why it works:

Toddlers are more likely to try to climb from a crib, particularly as they get closer to age 2. Therefore, cribs should only be used when a toddler is not able to climb out and fall.

Safety Tip No. 2: Offer child appropriate sleeping furniture (for older toddlers)

What to do:

Provide toddlers with washable cots that are not far from or on the floor when they are old enough to climb out of the crib.

Why it works:

When toddlers begin sleeping on a cot, they may not be used to sleeping in the middle and could fall to the floor. If cots are close to the ground, toddlers will not get hurt if they fall. Cots and bedding need to be washable to maintain a healthy sleep environment. Refer to CFOC'sSleeping Equipment and Supplies for details.

Indoor Play

Safety Tip No. 1: Use equipment and materials that are safe for toddlers and have no small parts

What to do:

Use equipment and materials that are appropriate for toddlers. Place heavy items on bottom shelves and lighter items up high. State child care licensing websites and child care resource and referral centers may have lists of these specifications by state. Regularly monitor the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's website for recalls. Subscribe to receive alerts: http://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/Subscribe/.

Place any object that is small enough to fit into a toddler's mouth out of reach. This includes small toys such as marbles, balloons, small balls, and coins, as well as parts of toys that may break off—buttons on a teddy bear.12 If the object will pass through the small-parts cylinder used for screening choking hazards [PDF, 31KB] for children younger than 3 years, it is too small for play.

For more information, see ASTM toy test equipment small parts cylinder [PDF, 31KB] and Which Toy for Which Child: A Consumer's Guide for Selecting Suitable Toys [PDF, 1.1MB].

Why it works:

Toddlers continue to use all of their senses to learn about objects in their environment. They will pick up objects and may put them into their mouths. They need equipment and materials designed to keep them safe as they explore their environments, reducing the likelihood of injury. Placing heavier items on lower shelving reduces the risk of injury from a dropped toy.

Safety Tip No. 2: Instruct toddlers in the safe use of materials and equipment

What to do:

Teach toddlers how to use materials and equipment appropriately. Examples include, "crayons are for coloring" and "paint brushes are for painting."

Why it works:

Toddlers begin to use more equipment and materials for projects and play. They learn by watching and will copy the behavior of children and caregivers. By offering clear rules and demonstrating how to use materials and equipment, caregivers encourage toddlers to engage in activities safely.

¹²U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. (2004, September). CPSC Warns Parents about Choking Hazards to Young Children. Retrieved from http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PREREL/prhtml04/04216.html.

Outdoor Play

Safety Tip No. 1: Instruct toddlers in the safe use of outdoor materials and equipment

What to do:

Teach toddlers how to use balls, sand tables, and other outdoor equipment safely. This includes using appropriate helmets and safety gear when riding tricycles, scooters, big wheels, and other riding toys.

Why it works:

Toddlers begin to use more equipment and materials for outdoor play. By providing clear instructions and rules for how to use them, caregivers make it possible for toddlers to engage safely in new kinds of activities. Getting toddlers into the habit of wearing helmets, pads, and other protective gear when they use riding toys will reduce the likelihood of injury from falls, particularly the incidence of head injury.

Safety Tip No. 2: Teach toddlers pedestrian safety techniques

What to do:

Offer basic instruction about walking on sidewalks and crossing streets, like holding hands and following directions. Additional tips, lessons, and teaching strategies can be found at http://www.safekids.org/safety-basics/little-kids/on-the-way/pedestrian-safety.html.

Why it works:

Toddlers are beginning to explore the world outside their homes and classrooms. They have opportunities to walk to the neighborhood park, school, or other community locations. It may be hard for drivers and cyclists to see them, so toddlers need to understand pedestrian safety and learn how to follow rules to avoid risks that could place them in danger.

Preschoolers

By the time they are preschool-aged, children are more independent in their play and their ability to meet their own needs. They focus on learning rules and routines to know what is safe and appropriate. Their constant dialogue with peers and caregivers helps them to form specific ideas about what is safe and why. Read More about Preschoolers

Preschoolers move and play with ease. Climbing, running, and jumping are still favorite activities, and they are becoming much better at them. Many children also begin to pedal tricycles, play sports, and attempt more difficult climbing equipment. Their stronger motor skills give them the confidence to constantly try new things. During these years, preschoolers challenge themselves and develop a better understanding of the consequences of their actions. This trial-and-error approach complements the structure and rules teachers and families provide.

Preschoolers' growing cognitive and language abilities help them identify and avoid risks. Some children are able to talk about the challenges they would like to take with teachers and family members, while others are more likely to act impulsively. Many children this age are able to discuss safety rules for their classrooms, homes, or communities. They may ask why something happens or why a certain rule exists. When preschoolers question the rules, teachers can help them understand the possible consequences of not following the rules. Through these conversations,

preschoolers learn to identify guidelines that will help them make safe choices.

Depending on a preschooler's temperament, some may question and test every rule. Others may be more cautious and will follow the rules they are given. Preschoolers also may take on a leadership role by offering warnings and praise to their peers and younger children as they begin to understand what is safe and why.

Preschoolers are active learners. Teachers who talk with children about rules and routines help them to make safe choices.

CLOSE

All Daily Routines

Safety Tip No. 1: Actively supervise

What to do:

Closely watch, engage, and redirect preschoolers to create safe learning opportunities. Teachers use active supervision with preschoolers at all times. Active supervision includes these six strategies:

- Setting up the environment
- Positioning staff
- Scanning and counting
- Listening
- Anticipating children's behavior
- Engaging and redirecting

Why it works:

Preschool children engage in understanding the world beyond their home and family through developing rules and routines. Their natural excitement about new things may lead them to take risks. While their judgment is improving, they may not always make good choices. Teachers who constantly observe preschoolers are careful to engage them in safe activities and redirect them when necessary. They also help preschoolers learn and create rules and routines to prevent injuries.

Safety Tip No. 2: Create safe environments

What to do:

Create indoor spaces with age-appropriate furniture. Use safety locks and gates to allow preschoolers to explore safely. Avoid furniture that obstructs a clear line of vision and prevents caregivers from seeing and hearing children at all times. In outdoor play spaces, use playground equipment that is appropriate for preschoolers. Use page seven of the Public Playground Safety Handbook [PDF, 1.2MB] to find safe equipment.

Why it works:

Preschoolers continue to challenge themselves and learn the rules about what is safe. Safety locks and gates guard against unsafe exploration. Furniture that is waist-high allows caregivers to see and hear everything that is happening in the room, regardless of whether they are sitting or standing.

Preschoolers' growing confidence may cause them to take on challenges on the playground. They have some sense of danger, but still may want to try things that are beyond their ability. By creating a developmentally appropriate playground and providing active supervision, preschoolers can engage in risk taking safely and practice new or

emerging skills while learning safety rules.

Safety Tip No. 3: Maintain safe environments

What to do:

Conduct safety inspections on indoor and outdoor environments before using them and remove any hazards.

Why it works:

Preschoolers have more confidence because they have more control over their bodies. They are likely to take on greater challenges. By consistently using safety checklists [PDF, 404KB] to conduct safety inspections of equipment and materials in their environments, teachers are always aware of the condition of the materials and equipment that children use and can address a problem before someone is injured.

Safety Tip No. 4: Store and lock poisonous products

What to do:

Place cleaning products and medications in locked cabinets out of preschoolers' reach. Store staff coats, purses, and bags in closets or outside the classroom.

Why it works:

Preschoolers continue to explore their environment by testing out the unknown. Preschoolers who find a bottle of chemicals might try to use it or may spill it onto their skin. They may try to open a medication bottle and take the medication. These actions could burn or poison the child. Storing all poisons in a locked area and keeping personal belongings out of reach protect children from injury. Furthermore, talking to preschoolers about why unsafe materials need to be kept out of reach and locked away will help them learn why certain products are unsafe.

Diapering and Toileting

Safety Tip No. 1: Stay "hands on" and teach safe behaviors while diapering

What to do:

For young preschoolers who are still wearing diapers, keep a hand near them to prevent falls from changing stations. Sturdy step stools can help them climb onto changing tables safely. You also may want to change children while they are standing.

Why it works:

Young preschoolers may wear training pants or diapers because they are still learning how to use the toilet. During diapering, they may try to jump or climb on or off of the changing table. By keeping a hand on young preschoolers, using a step stool, or changing children while they are standing, teachers can keep them from falling.

Safety Tip No. 2: Be attentive during bathroom use

What to do:

Provide adult supervision of bathroom activities.

Why it works:

Over time, preschoolers are able to toilet themselves and become more independent in their toileting habits. However, there are many hazards in the bathroom that require adult supervision. Children also may want to explore and play in the bathroom, so they require adult supervision to prevent injuries.

Meal Times

Safety Tip No. 1: Teach children how to eat safely

What to do:

Teach preschool children how to use cups, spoons, and forks safely.

Why it works:

Preschoolers use various eating utensils with their meals. Their love of imaginative play may cause them to want to use a utensil as a toy, leading to unsafe behaviors at the table. When teachers sit with children during family style eating, they promote healthy and safe mealtime behaviors.

Napping

Safety Tip No. 1: Provide age-appropriate, child-sized cots or mats for napping

What to do:

Provide age-appropriate, washable child-sized cots or mats for naptime.

Why it works:

Cots or mats are close to or on the ground to prevent falls. Cots and bedding need to be washable to maintain a healthy sleep environment. Refer to *Caring for Our Children* from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (CFOC) Standard 5.4.5.1., Sleeping Equipment and Supplies for more details.

Indoor Play

Safety Tip No. 1: Use child-safe equipment and materials

What to do:

Use child sized equipment and materials that are appropriate for preschoolers. See CFOC Standard 2.1.3.3., "Selection of Equipment for Three- to Five-Year-Olds." Regularly monitor the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's website for safe equipment and materials: http://www.cpsc.gov/. Additionally, talking with children about using equipment and materials safely teaches them healthy and safe habits.

Why it works:

Preschoolers are developing confidence in their abilities and may want to use items that are not age appropriate. Ensuring that they have materials that are safe for use by children of their age will reduce the likelihood of injury.

Safety Tip No. 2: Instruct preschool children in the safe use of materials and equipment

What to do:

Teach preschool children how to use scissors and other tools safely. For example, "Scissors need to be held closed with the loops out when passing them to a friend."

Why it works:

Preschoolers use a variety of tools for projects and play. By offering clear instruction and rules for using equipment and materials, caregivers make it possible for them to engage safely in new kinds of activities. Learning these rules helps children know how to interact with similar items in other settings as well, ensuring their safety beyond the program.

Outdoor Play

Safety Tip No. 1: Instruct preschoolers in the safe use of outdoor materials and equipment

What to do:

Teach preschoolers how to use balls, sand tables, and other outdoor equipment. Encourage them to request help if they want assistance when using a climbing structure. Teach preschoolers to use helmets and safety gear when riding tricycles, bicycles, scooters, big wheels, and other riding toys. Refer to the CFOC Appendices for information on fitting helmets properly. Remember, helmets for riding toys should *not* be worn on playground equipment.

Why it works:

Preschoolers use a variety of equipment and materials for outdoor play. Their increasing mastery of their body allows them to use riding toys with ease. Wearing helmets, pads, and other equipment will help to keep them safe from falls, bumps, and bruises. It also provides early modeling to encourage children to wear safety gear to protect them from injury when they are old enough to join a sports team. It's important to remember, however, that wearing a bicycle helmet when playing on playground equipment poses a strangulation hazard.

By offering clear rules and active supervision, caregivers make it possible for preschoolers to engage safely in a range of activities. Learning safety rules will help them as they play in other outdoor spaces at home and in the community, as well.

Safety Tip No. 2: Teach pedestrian safety techniques

What to do:

Offer basic instruction in walking on sidewalks and crossing streets, including looking both ways before crossing and holding hands with an adult. For additional tips, lessons, and teaching strategies, see: http://www.safekids.org/safety-basics/little-kids/on-the-way/pedestrian-safety.html.

Why it works:

Preschoolers explore the world outside their homes and classrooms by taking trips with their families. They have opportunities to walk to the neighborhood park, school, and other community locations. Pedestrian safety guidelines allow them to become more independent while teaching them to explore safely. It can be difficult for drivers and cyclists to see them. Therefore, preschoolers need to understand pedestrian safety and learn how to follow rules in order to avoid risks that could place them in danger.

¹Morrongiello, B., & Corbett, M. (2008). Elaborating a Conceptual Model of Young Children's Risk of Unintentional Injury and Implications for Prevention Strategies. *Health Psychology Review,* 2(2).

Required Viewers:

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