



Child-Proofing Your Home

The best way to protect your child is to think in terms of *multiple barriers*.

- The first barrier between a child and any danger is you, always watching out of the corner of your eye.
- Keep the door to a dangerous room closed at all times and maybe locked.
- Keep the dangerous stuff high in a cabinet. Sometimes an older child may visit and climb up and offer that forbidden substance to your child.
- Keep cabinets locked. Kiddie locks are good and effective.
- For the really dangerous stuff, such as

Drano, gasoline products and medicines, get a hinge-type lock with a key. You can hang the key beside the lock on a cup hook, so that it isn't inconvenient for you but your toddler can't open it and neither can most older kids.

Most protective measures you will be able to figure out for yourselves depending on what your home is like, but here are a few tips:

- Beware of where you put hot beverages. Coffee cups should go in the middle of the table, not on the edge.
- Pots on the stove should have their handles turned inwards.
- If you have a party, don't leave your drinks around afterwards. We once had to hospitalize a drunk two-year-old in a coma. He did well after sleeping it off and scaring his parents half to death.
- Keep children in walkers away from stairs and sharp edges.
- Sharp objects, especially little ones such as toothpicks, are dangerous. If a child swallows a toothpick, it can perforate the intestine.

- Electrical outlet covers are recommended.
- Never leave a child unattended in a bath, even for a minute. All children should learn to swim by the age of five to seven, but learning at the ages of one or two years is not an effective safety measure.
- Turn down your water heater to a maximum temperature of 120 to 130 degrees. At these temperatures accidental water burns will be much less severe.

Notice that I haven't said anything about teaching your child to understand the word "no," nor about slapping your child's hand. These techniques do not work. Toddlers have not connected up the restraining part of their brains very well.

They are much more likely to learn how to play the "No Game." That's where they reach out to touch something and you say "no." They look at you and smile and reach out again. You dutifully say "no" and so on. You get better trained than your child does.

My advice is to leave the moral education until later when they will be better learners. In the meantime, use multiple barriers. Also, be prepared to seek help. Say that you walk in on your two year old and find that he has apparently eaten about half a bottle of pills. What should you do?

The first thing to do is to call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222, or 1-800-523-2222. This is the best and quickest way to find out what to do, which will depend upon what was ingested. In the past, we recommended giving milk or inducing vomiting, but now we recommend that you call Poison Control immediately, to get the correct and most up-to-date advice. With all of these necessary precautions, we still need to strike a balance and let kids find out some things for themselves. One of the best places to do this is in a controlled area, such as the little kids area in the park. The best general policy might be this: make sure an area is childproof, then turn them loose!

