

10 Tips for Keeping Children Safe

1 Never shake a baby.

Vigorously shaking a baby by the arms, legs, chest or shoulders can cause brain damage or blindness. These injuries are called “shaken baby syndrome.” An estimated 50,000 cases occur in the U.S. each year, and one in four shaken babies dies from this abuse.

2 Healthy babies should sleep on their backs.

Medical experts now believe that putting healthy babies down to sleep on their backs reduces the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Ask your doctor about the best sleep position for your baby.

3 Safety measures can prevent accidental injuries.

Babies should sleep in cribs with up-to-date safety features. Soft surfaces (such as couches), large stuffed toys, and too many covers can suffocate an infant. Child-proof your home to protect curious toddlers. By law, you must use a car seat for infants and young children. Teach older children to buckle up before every car trip. If your children ride bikes, skateboard, or play sports, provide proper protective gear such as helmets and pads.

4 Never leave children alone in a car.

In summer, a closed car can quickly heat up to dangerous levels. In winter, a closed car left running can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Children alone in cars are also easy targets for car jackers or child snatchers.

5 Don't leave children home alone until they can be responsible.

Infants and young children should never be left alone. With older kids, it's a matter of maturity and preparation. Can your child follow ground rules (stay in the yard, no cooking, no opening the door to strangers)? Have you role played what to do in case of fire, injury, or other emergency? Is there a safe place to go (such as next door), if necessary? Does your child know how to contact you? A rebellious teen may require more supervision than a responsible ten-year-old. Use your own good judgment. Prepare your child, start with short periods alone, and monitor results.

6 Be careful who cares for your child.

Sadly, too many children are abused by unrelated caretakers, including immature babysitters or a parent's boyfriend or girlfriend. Choose experienced, responsible caregivers who like children. Discuss your child's needs, habits, and schedule. Communicate your rules and expectations about discipline. Make sure the caretaker knows what to do in an emergency, and check in frequently to monitor your child's well-being.

7 Learn about child development.

Children go through many phases as they grow. Most parents find that toddlers and teens present special challenges. Learning what you can reasonably expect from children at each stage makes parenting easier. Visit your local library, book store, or the Internet for helpful information about child development.

8 Use discipline to teach.

No one is born with good judgment or self control. Over many years, children develop these skills through training and guidance from caring adults. Discipline is an important teaching tool. It involves setting age-appropriate limits; being consistent; and linking lapses in behavior to non-violent consequences: time out, loss of privileges, restitution, extra chores. For sound advice, seek out the many books available on effective discipline of children and teens.

9 Overwhelmed? Ask for help!

Tragically, child abuse often results when adult anger and frustration spin out of control. Every parent feels overwhelmed at times. When it happens to you, ask for help! Relatives, friends, religious advisors, and other professionals will understand. Two sources of local assistance are:

- the 24-hour Parent Helpline, (513) 961-8004.
- the ParentSource Info Line, (513) 751-0400, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday.

10 Report child abuse and neglect.

In Hamilton County, call 241-KIDS—(513) 241-5437. You won't have to give your name. You will help a child.

