

## Keeping Children Safe

Whether your family child care program is located in a space used only for family child care or takes place throughout your home, safety is the first consideration. In a family child care home, you—and you alone—are responsible for the safety of the children in your care. Supervision is critical. The National Association for Family Child Care safety standards require that providers be able to see or hear all children at all times. Children under age 5 may not be left inside or outside by themselves. Children younger than age 3 must be in the provider's sight at all times, except when the provider is attending to his or her personal needs for as many as 5 minutes. When children age 3 or older are not in sight, providers must be able to hear them.<sup>1</sup>

Childproofing your home to eliminate dangers and potential accidents is a vital step in preparing your home for children. A safe environment enables children to explore, satisfy their curiosity, and learn through play. Your choice and organization of materials and equipment can prevent accidents. In a safe environment, you can encourage children to explore instead of worrying about possible injuries.

One of the challenges of maintaining a safe environment in a family child care home is meeting the needs of a diverse group that may include infants, toddlers, twos, preschool children, and school-age children. Your knowledge of child development will help you think about how to set up the environment. For example, if infants are in your care, you need a protected space where they can play on the floor without getting run over by an older child. You also need a place where older children can play actively without tripping over babies. A toy that is appropriate for a 4-year-old can be a choking hazard for an infant or toddler. Safety concerns change as children develop, so your environment may need to change as young infants become mobile and as toddlers become preschoolers. Assess your environment frequently as well as when you begin caring for a new child. Make any changes needed to keep children safe.

Some safety hazards are unique to family child care programs because they are in a home setting. Fireplaces and firearms, for instance, are rarely found in a child care center, but they are in some family child care homes. Bathroom and bedroom doors may have locks. Although child care centers often have pet rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, or gerbils, they rarely have dogs or cats. Use a safety checklist to identify hazards in both your indoor and outdoor environments.

Here are some additional safety guidelines:

**Be aware of ongoing safety hazards.** For instance, always keep pot handles turned toward the back of the stove when you are cooking so children cannot grab them and pull pots down on themselves. Make sure that you always put away sharp scissors and knives. Keep matches, plastic bags, and pocketbooks out of children's reach. Lock away medications, cleaning materials, and other toxic substances.

**Check some things every day.** Before you take children outdoors, make sure that your yard is free of trash, broken glass, and animal waste. Check that outlets are covered and that the child safety locks on cabinets are closed every day.

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