

## Safety Indoors

Homes are for people to use and live in and it is impossible to make them completely safe for babies and young children. However, there is much we can do to prevent accidents from happening:



- dangerous objects should be kept away from children and
- children should be kept away from dangerous situations.

Every reasonable precaution must also be taken to ensure the safety of children in playgroups, creches and schools.

### Dangerous Objects:

The following objects should be kept from children until they are old enough to use them sensibly.

**Plastic Bags:** There is a danger of suffocation if a plastic bag is put over the head. Plastic material is airtight (it does not allow air to escape or pass through it) and clings to warm surfaces. Therefore, a plastic bag over the head will be very difficult to remove.

**Small hard objects:** Sweets, peanuts, small pieces from a toy (e.g. small Lego pieces) etc., can cause choking if swallowed. Choking is one of the most common accidents because babies put everything into their mouths.



**Medicines:** These can be poisonous and should be locked in a cabinet which needs adult hands to open it. Pills, tablets and medicines in child resistant containers are difficult for a child to get at, but bear in mind, some children are able to open them, as child resistant does not mean child proof. Blister or strip packs make it less easy for a child to swallow a lot of pills at once. On the other hand, children may find these packs attractive to play with, especially if they see adults using them.



**Poisons:** Cleaning materials, alcohol, weed-killers, other garden chemicals and berries of a number of plants are poisonous to babies and young children and should be stored out of their reach. Empty drink bottles should never be used to store poisonous liquids to avoid them being drunk by accident.



**Sharp objects:** There a number of these in the average home, for example sharp knives, scissors, razor blades and needles. They should be kept out of the reach of young children.

**Inflammable items:** Matches, lighters, petrol, paraffin, methylated spirits (used for lighting camping stoves) and fireworks should be stored where children cannot reach them.



## Dangerous Situations

This section applies to **toddlers** in particular. At this stage, children are able to move around but are not yet old enough to understand about safety.

**Safety barriers or gates:** These prevent young children from wandering to a part of the house that parents/carers consider dangerous. Safety gates are often fitted across the top and bottom of the stairs and the kitchen doorway (the kitchen is the most dangerous place in the house).

A safety gate should have locks which children cannot undo and bars in which they cannot get their head, hands or feet trapped. It should be too high for a small child to climb over. If a child should climb over a barrier at the top of the stairs, the fall can be more serious than a simple fall down the stairs.



**Electricity:** Young children should be kept away from electrical equipment and supplies because of the risk of:

*Electric Shock* – if electrical equipment is damaged or live wires are touched, it can cause a shock. Worn or damaged flexes (the wires coming out of appliances) on electrical appliances such as hair straighteners, can also cause a shock. Modern electricity sockets are designed to prevent tiny fingers or small objects from being poked inside and safety socket covers are also available and should be used. Electrical equipment should never be touched when the hands are wet, as this increases the likelihood of an electric shock. Keep electrical equipment out of a child's reach. This includes the flexes as a child may pull the electrical equipment which may cause it to become disconnected from the electricity supply.

*Injury from moving parts* – items such as electric mixers and food processors can cause a nasty accident.

**Fire Hazards** – electric irons and phone chargers are examples of equipment which if misused, can cause a fire.

**Burns** – electric cookers, heaters, kettles and irons (with the flex hanging down, as in the picture) can cause very severe burns or



**Fire:** Keeping children away from fires prevents them from burning themselves and also prevents the furniture or the house from catching fire. Fireguards should be put in front of open fires. A good fireguard similar to the one in the picture should be:



- strong and sturdy and have a cover on top
- have no sharp edges
- be firmly fixed to the wall by hooks which cannot be undone by a small child
- have mesh small enough to prevent a baby pushing his arms or small child pushing his arms or toys through
- have a door (if there is one) that fastens securely.

**Fireguards in front of a fire should never be used as a clothes dryer.**

*Objects on the mantelpiece:* These can tempt children to reach for them and this poses a danger if there is a fire underneath. A mirror over the mantelpiece may also tempt children to go too close to a fire.

## Making the Home Safe

There are some parts of every home for which it is impossible to keep young children away from or to keep out of their reach. The only thing to do is to make these areas as safe as possible.

### Floors

Children can hurt themselves when they slip. To reduce this danger:

- Always wipe up spilt grease or liquid
- It is safer to have a heavy mat than a lightweight one
- If floors have to be polished, use non-slip polish
- Never polish under mats

### Windows

To prevent children falling out of windows:

- Young children should never be left alone in a room with an open window through which they could fall, unless there are safety bars on the window.
- Catches need to be securely fastened on all windows that children can reach.
- Keeps chairs, tables and in the bedroom, keep beds away from windows to help prevent children from climbing onto the window sills.

Young children are unsteady on their feet and fall over easily and older children tend to play rough games, so in houses with children, it is better to have toughened (safety) glass in any windows or glass doors which are in danger of being broken. Another way to make glass safer is to cover it with a film of clear plastic made specially for this purpose.

Cords and chains on window blinds, door blinds and curtains can strangle children and cause death. They are a risk to all children, particularly children under the age of 3. Cords and chains with loops are a particular risk. The HSE recommend removing all curtains and blinds with cords or chains from your home and replace them with blinds or curtains that have none.



### Cookers

Ideally, a cooker should have controls which are difficult for a child to reach and switch on. When the hob is in use, it can be made safer by a cooker guard. Turning the handles of pans inwards makes them more difficult to reach and tip over.



### Tablecloths

These can be a danger, as a young child could pull the tablecloth spilling the contents of hot tea/coffee on himself. Liquids do not need to be very hot to damage the skin of a