

KEEPING TODDLERS SAFE AT HOME

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

When I lived in New Zealand, one of my jobs was as a registered nurse working in the community. I loved helping new mothers with their babies and working with school-aged children. For several years, since moving to the States, I worked in industrial safety.

Between having kids myself, advising new mothers, and keeping workers safe, I have become intensely aware of safety issues around the home. I thought this would be a good time to give readers a heads up on home hazards so easily overlooked.

Children can drown in 2 inches of water. My young friend thought it was perfectly safe to lay her 12-month-old flat on his back in the bath while the water lapped around his ears and go and do something in another room. That is not a wise decision. Babies can roll over. Children can slip in soapy water, and when there are several children in the bath at once, they can tumble over one another. They can also get burned by turning on the hot water or by clinging to a hot faucet. These are some reasons to never leave a child in the bath, or around water, unattended.

There are many ways a child can get burned around the home. Hot cups of coffee on low side tables are easy to reach. Pot handles can be reached when children are sitting on a countertop while food is cooking. Knives, scissors, pins, and needles left in easy reach are tempting to small children. We had a 10-year-old visiting our home last evening and he had in his pocket some little scissors, cross-stitch material, and a sewing needle. At the end of the evening he told me he had lost the needle. We still haven't found it and it worries me that someone will step on it with bare feet.

When we let children use potentially dangerous items we need to show them how to be safe with them. In this case, I told him that he needed to keep everything in a little plastic bag and that the needle should always be hooked into the material. It also needs to be threaded so that if it does fall out, the needle can be seen more easily.

I think most parents are aware of keeping poisonous chemicals out of kids' reach, but we don't always consider medication either left out, in nightstand table drawers, or in low level bathroom cabinets. Liquor is sometimes stored in easy to reach cabinets or in low wine racks.

In our nursing training we were told never to let a toddler play with anything smaller than what could fit inside a toilet tissue roll. We are aware of the usual choking hazards related to our own children's ages, but when a younger child visits, your toy box may contain small toy pieces that could be hazardous. Buttons and beads are currently fashionable and small children can find them on the floor and push them up their noses. It is not a good idea to allow a small child to eat chips, pieces of apple, carrot or crackers while they are

in a place where you can't get at them quickly if they choked – like while traveling in a car seat.

It is a good idea to check your back yard for dangerous plants, holes in fences, and sharp objects. If there are no fences, then a responsible person should stay with young children and supervise them. Watch out for hot grills, mowing grass while kids are nearby, and remember to always keep your garden shed locked. Children can get hurt when we least expect it.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.