

Child Safety

How to keep your home safe for your baby

How can I make the crib safe for my baby?

The space between the crib bars should be less than 2-3/8 inches. If the space is too wide, your baby could slip through the space and strangle between the bars.

Use the ruler on the right to check the width of the space between the bars on the crib. You can weave a cloth between the bars if they are too far apart.

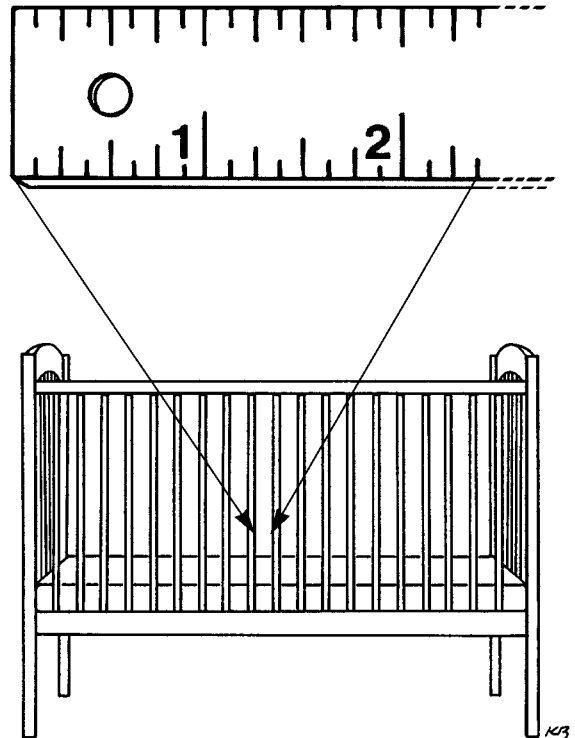
The corner posts of the crib should be level with the top of the crib rails. No corner posts should be sticking up. You can unscrew the corner posts or saw them off so they are level with the top of the crib rails.

The mattress should fit snugly against the sides of the crib. No more than two fingers should fit in the space between the mattress and the sides of the crib. Place rolled towels between the mattress and the crib if the mattress is too small.

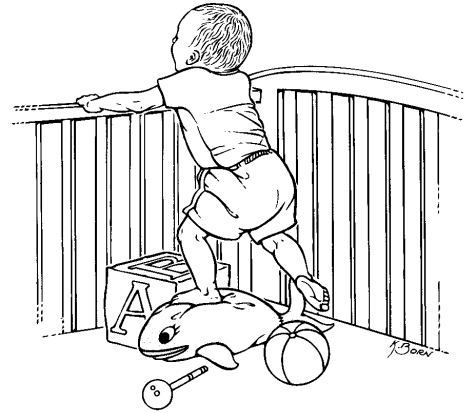
Babies can't breathe if a plastic bag gets over their nose and mouth. So the mattress should be protected by a mattress pad, not a plastic bag or a garbage bag.

Babies can strangle if a cord gets around their necks. Move the crib away from electric cords, drapes and curtain cords or tie the cords up so they are less than 6 inches long and out of your child's reach.

Mobiles and hanging crib toys should be kept out of your baby's reach so your baby can't be choked or strangled. Also remove strings on crib toys and pacifiers.



If your baby can push up, remove bumpers, pillows and toys from the crib. Your baby can use these things to climb out of the crib and fall.



How can I make the kitchen and bathroom safer?

In the kitchen, make sure that stove burner controls are out of your child's reach. Pot handles should be turned toward the back of the stove. Use the back burners on the stove for cooking.

Coffee and tea mugs and hot foods should be kept out of reach—away from the edge of a counter or table. Knives and other sharp utensils should also be kept out of reach or in locked or “child-proof” latched drawers or cabinets. Appliance cords should be wound up and kept out of reach.

Children under four shouldn't be given round, firm foods—like grapes, peanuts, hot dogs and hard candy. Children can choke on these foods.

Medicines, vitamins and cleaning supplies should be stored out of reach in locked cabinets. Children can't tell what is medicine and what is candy.

What if my child swallows something he or she shouldn't?

Call a poison control center right away. Keep the telephone number handy by your phone. *Syrup of ipecac* can be used to make your child throw up the poison, but it should only be used if the poison control center recommends it. In some states you may need a doctor's prescription to get it.

How can bath time be safer?

Children can drown in very little water. They can also turn on the hot water and burn themselves. You should always stay with your child when he or she is in the bathtub. Take your child with you if you have to answer the phone or doorbell while your child is in the tub. NEVER leave your child alone or with an older child in the bathroom or tub—not even for a minute.

You should always test the water before putting your child in the tub. Young children have tender skin and are easily burned if the water is too hot.

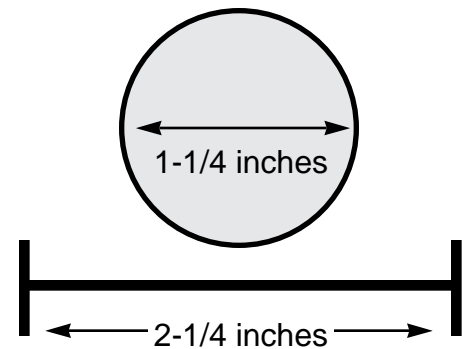
To check the temperature of the hot water coming out of the faucet, run the water for three minutes. Let the water run over a meat or candy thermometer. The temperature should be 120°F or less. If the water is hotter, the temperature on the hot water heater should be lowered.

Electrical items such as hair dryers should be kept away from the water and unplugged when you aren't using them. These things can cause an electric shock if they fall into the sink or bathtub while plugged in.

How can I be sure toys are safe?

Toys meant for older children should be kept away from younger children. Many toys are labeled with the ages of children who can use them safely. This doesn't mean the toy is too advanced for your younger child, just that it's not safe. These toys may have small parts, batteries or electrical parts that can hurt young children.

The parts on toys for children younger than three should not be smaller than 1-1/4 inches in diameter or 2-1/4 inches long. Any part smaller than this could cause your child to choke.

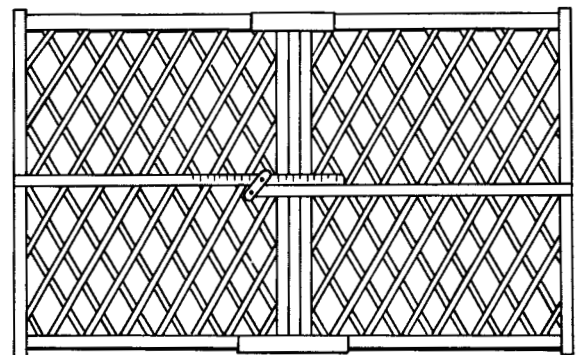


What about houseplants?

Plants should be placed out of your child's reach. Some houseplants are poisonous. Call your local poison control center to find out if your plants are poisonous.

Are stairs dangerous?

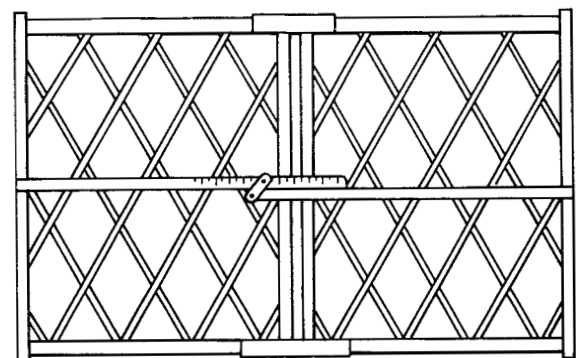
They can be. Use toddler gates at the top and bottom of stairs. Gates with big spaces between the slats shouldn't be used—children can get trapped in the openings.



Safe gate

What about windows?

Keep children away from open windows to prevent falls. Use window guards to keep children from falling out of the window. Screens are made to keep bugs out but are NOT strong enough to keep children in. Move chairs and other furniture away from windows to keep children from climbing near the window. It's safer to open windows from the top, so children can't climb out.



Unsafe gate

Safety Tips

- Keep plastic bags and deflated or burst balloons away from young children.
- Use plastic inserts to cover electric outlet openings that aren't being used.
- Keep alcohol and cigarettes away from young children.
- Keep guns and other firearms out of the house. If guns are in the house, unload them, put them in a locked place and keep the keys out of your child's reach. Store the gun separate from the bullets.
- Put your coffee or tea mug down before you pick up or hold your child. Many children are burned by hot liquids their parents are holding.
- When your baby is placed on anything above the ground, like a changing table, you should always stand nearby with your hand on your baby. Your baby could roll over and fall to the floor.
- Lock matches and lighters in a cabinet that is higher than your shoulders. Children as young as two can start fires with lighters.
- Use toddler gates at the top and bottom of stairs. Gates with big spaces between the slats shouldn't be used—children can get trapped in the openings.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



The American Academy of Family Physicians, one of the nation's largest medical specialty groups, is committed to promoting and maintaining high standards for family doctors—the doctors who give ongoing, comprehensive care to people of all ages.

© 1994, 1995, 1996 American Academy of Family Physicians
8880 Ward Parkway, Kansas City, MO 64114-2797
<http://www.aafp.org>

Permission is granted to reproduce this material for nonprofit educational uses. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.



This health education material has been favorably reviewed by the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.