Importance of safety for families and children with special health care needs

All children need a safe environment to grow and thrive. But, as children grow, it can be hard for parents to know when to let go, especially parents who have a child with a special health care need (CSHCN).

It helps to know that as children grow, other members of your community help to make sure all children are safe near your home, at school, and other activities.

Thinking about safety

Parents of CSHCN have to balance their child’s skills and safety issues so their child can be as independent as possible. You may have to think outside the box when it comes to safety, like considering more safety equipment or assistive technology. Your health care provider is an important resource and can work with you to create a safe environment for your child.

Safety at all ages

- **Pregnancy:** Babies live in a protected environment before birth. Even so, falls, alcohol use, smoking, and some medications can hurt your baby before she is born. Talk to your doctor about healthy behaviors to keep you and your baby safe.

- **Infancy:** Your baby needs you to keep him or her safe. Do not leave your baby unattended. Always put your baby in an infant car seat when riding in the car. Provide a safe place for your baby to sleep and put your baby to sleep on his back. Get down on your hands and knees and crawl through your home to see what your baby will see and remove dangerous small objects and pad hard surfaces.

- **Early Childhood:** One- to four-year-olds think they can do more than they really can. Try to set limits without a constant stream of “No! No! No!” By creating safe play spaces, you will not have to say no all the time. If someone else is helping to care for your child in your home, explain the safety rules.

- **Middle Childhood:** Teachers and others help keep school-aged children safe. Teach your child about unsafe situations outside of your home. This might include a friend’s home with guns, common in Wyoming. Talk to your child and explain that he should never play with real guns. Even if your child uses a gun when hunting, he should never use a gun without an adult and in a safe environment. Bullies can be a serious problem for five- to 10-year-olds. Teach children tips for dealing with bullies.

- **Adolescence:** Teens are developing more relationships outside their families. They are influenced by friends, the media, and the Internet. Sometimes teens make decisions without considering their safety. Talk to your teen about peer pressure and how to avoid potentially risky situations involving alcohol, tobacco, and sexual behavior.
What can families do to promote safety?

Families can play a major role in keeping children and teens safe:

► Try to be one step ahead of where your child is developmentally.
► Explain safety rules and guidelines in ways that your child can understand.
► Take time to listen to your child’s point of view and fears.
► Be aware of potential dangers in your home and community. Alert other caregivers of dangers you see.

Look for ways to prevent injuries from happening:

► Make sure your safety equipment is working. For example, make sure your car seat is securely and correctly installed in your car.
► Make sure older children have good quality helmets that fit well for bicycling and other sports.
► Keep guns locked away.

Be prepared in the case of injury:

► Take a First Aid and CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation) class at your local hospital, Red Cross, American Heart Association, or other community organization.
► Have a first aid kit and a list of emergency telephone numbers, including the National Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222). Save emergency numbers in your phone.
► Speak with your child’s school about their policy on handling your child’s condition and their emergency plan.
► Know when to call a health care provider. If you are not sure, it is best to go ahead and call. Make an emergency plan with your child. Talk together about what each person in the family would do.
► Plan for an emergency. Do not let medications run out and know where your child’s essential medical supplies and records are kept.
► If your child has a special health care need, alert local emergency responders so they will be prepared in the event of an emergency.

Resources for families

http://www.mchlibrary.info/guides/childsafety.html
Maternal and Child Health: Resources for Child Safety and Injury Prevention

http://www.safekids.org/safety-basics/special-needs/
Safe Kids USA: Keeping Children with Special Needs Safe in the Home

http://cshcn.org/planning-record-keeping/safety-tips/
The Center for Children with Special Needs: Safety Tips

http://www.safekidswyoming.org
Safe Kids Wyoming

References

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