

# A GUIDE FOR NEW PARENTS GETTING YOUR HOME READY FOR BABY



CENTER *for* INJURY  
RESEARCH & POLICY

*The Research Institute  
at Nationwide Children's Hospital*

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Most people think of their home as one of the places they feel the safest. However, because young children spend so much time at home, it is also the place where they are most likely to be injured. Every year, millions of children are unintentionally injured in the home, and thousands of these children die or suffer severe disabilities. Still, it is important for parents to know that most injuries can be prevented.

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Your baby will spend most of his or her time in the nursery, so make sure it is a safe place.



Becoming a parent can be a very fun and exciting time, but it can also be a lot of hard work. There are so many things to learn about taking care of a little one that it might seem overwhelming. While getting your home ready for the new baby, the number one goal should be keeping your baby safe. This guide will help you along your way.

## GETTING THE NURSERY READY

Newborns will spend most of their time in the nursery, so parents should do everything they can to make it a safe place. This begins with picking out safe, stable baby furniture. It is hard for most people to buy everything brand new, especially when you have friends or relatives giving away cribs and other products they used for their babies. This is fine as long as you check that these products are still safe.

This means:

- There are no broken, loose, or missing pieces. The paint is not peeling or chipped.
- The instructions and manufacturer information are still included.
- You have checked that the products have not been recalled. To do this, call the manufacturer or visit [www.recalls.gov](http://www.recalls.gov).

Sometimes grandparents or friends will say, “Well my children used this, and nothing bad ever happened to them.” But over the years, as more research is done, we learn more about what can be very dangerous for babies. Just because something was thought to be safe years ago does not mean it meets current standards. You do not want to take chances with a product that could be unsafe.

If you will be buying new furniture, you only want to buy the best – but this does NOT have to mean the most expensive! It just means a product that meets all current safety standards and is easy for you to use correctly every time.

# THE CRIB

More children are injured in cribs than any other nursery product. Thousands of babies are injured seriously enough to be treated in emergency departments every year. Here are some things to keep in mind when choosing a crib.



The slats of the crib should be no more than 2 and 3/8 inches apart. Look for a crib that has solid end panels. Cribs with cut outs or designs have spaces where babies can trap their heads or limbs.



Avoid cribs with decorative corner posts or knobs that stick up more than 1/16 of an inch - this is very small. These items may catch on a child's clothing and cause strangulation.



A tight fitting mattress with a fitted sheet is the only thing that should be in the crib. The mattress should be firm and flat. If you can fit more than 2 fingers between the mattress and the crib, it is not tight enough. Purchase a bigger mattress.



Do NOT add pillows, blankets, sleep positioners or bumper pads to the crib. These items can cause suffocation. Some parents think a bare crib looks too empty, but this is the best way to keep your baby safe.



NEVER place a baby to sleep on an adult bed, water bed or sofa. The soft surface can cause a child to suffocate. For most babies, it is best to sleep on their backs. Talk to your doctor to determine what is best for your baby.



When your child can pull himself up or stand, adjust the mattress so that it is at its lowest position. The crib sides should be at least 26 inches above the mattress.



Mobiles and hanging toys should be out of reach of the baby. They should be removed when a baby is able to push up on his hands and knees or at 5 months (whichever comes first). Do not use cords or strings to hang toys on the crib, because they can cause strangulation.



Check the manufacturer's instructions to determine when you child will outgrow the crib. Generally, this occurs when your child reaches a height of about 35 inches.

## CRIB RECALLS

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has recalled millions of drop-side cribs. The drop-side of the cribs can detach, which creates a space between the crib and the mattress. Babies can become trapped in this space and can suffocate.

If you have a recalled drop-side crib, check with the manufacturer about getting a repair kit for your crib. Do not try to alter the crib on your own.

For more information on crib recalls, visit [www.recalls.gov](http://www.recalls.gov).

## BASSINETS

In the early weeks of having a newborn in the home, some parents find it easier to use a bassinet in their bedroom.

If using a bassinet:

- Carefully read the instructions and manufacturer's information to be sure your child meets the height and weight restrictions.
- The bassinet should be sturdy with a wide base to prevent tipping over.
- Do not place pillows, blankets or anything else in the bassinet with the baby.

## BABY MONITORS

Parents often like to use baby monitors to hear when a baby is crying. However, remember that it is never ok to use a baby monitor as a replacement for adult supervision. Injuries to children can happen quickly and silently. Do not rely on a baby monitor to alert you that something is wrong.



## CHANGING TABLES

Changing tables can make it easier for parents to change diapers or dress their babies. However, children can fall from changing tables and suffer serious injuries.

If you are purchasing a changing table, look for one with baby safety straps and use the straps every time. Remember that in the second it takes to grab a diaper, a baby can roll off the table. Even when using the straps, always keep a hand on the baby and never leave the baby unattended on the table.



- The changing table should be sturdy, preferably with a 2 inch guardrail on each side.
- Keep diaper supplies within reach so you can have a hand on your baby at all times.
- Do not let the baby play with powders, creams or medication bottles.

## WINDOWS

Windows can be dangerous for young children, especially those on the 2nd story or higher. Falls from great heights and onto hard surfaces can cause brain damage or death.

It is important to know that window screens will NOT protect children from falling. Place window guards on all windows on the 2nd floor or higher. Window guards should have easy release mechanisms in case of a fire. If windows are opened, use window stops that prevent the window from opening more than 4 inches.



- Do not place a crib or furniture near a window. Your child could fall out of the window, or he could become strangled by the cords of the window blinds or drapes.
- Keep cords tucked out of reach or cut them short.
- Wall brackets and floor mounts can be purchased to hold cords taut.
- If a cord has a loop, cut it! The loops make an easy place for a child to become strangled.

It is important that no matter how you travel with your baby, you do it safely.



## CAR SEATS

Picking out the right car seat for a newborn can be tricky. With so many styles and prices, it is hard to know which seat is best. So here is the secret – the BEST seat is the one that fits your baby, your car, and will be the easiest for you to use correctly every time. Different car seats work better for different families. Before purchasing a car seat, try out different seats at the store and pick one that you find the easiest to use. Save the box and receipt until you have installed it in your car and know it will work well.

If you will be borrowing a seat from someone else, make sure you ask the following questions first:

- Has it been in a crash?
- Has it been recalled? Check at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).
- Does it have any visible cracks or loose parts?
- Are there pieces missing?
- Are the straps worn out or frayed?
- Is the car seat older than 6 years or has it reached the manufacturer's expiration date?

If you answer "Yes" to any of the questions, you should not use the seat. Make sure you have a copy of the car seat instructions. If you do not, you can call the manufacturer to ask for replacement instructions.

Only borrow a car seat from someone you trust. Never purchase a car seat from a yard sale or resale shop. Some car seats that have been in a crash can have cracks or broken pieces that may not be visible. A broken car seat will not protect your baby in a crash.

Safely installing a car seat in your car is not a difficult task – once you know what to do! However, it can be hard to figure it all out on your own. The best advice is to have a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician check that you have installed your seat correctly. Technicians are trained to know the safest way for children of all ages to travel, and they can provide tips to make installing the car seat easier for you.

When installing their child's car seat on their own, 7 out of 10 parents install it incorrectly. Having a certified technician help out will ensure you are doing everything correctly. To find out where and when you can have your car seat checked in your area, visit [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).



## TIPS FOR INSTALLING CAR SEATS

- Make sure your child is in the proper car seat for his age, weight, height, and development.
- Infants should be in rear-facing infant seats or rear-facing convertible seats until they are at the very least 20 pounds and 1 year of age. For the best protection, keep your child in a rear-facing seat until he reaches the maximum height or weight of the convertible seat.
- Before installing the car seat, read the car seat instructions and your car owner's manual.
- Never place a rear-facing car seat in front of an airbag.
- Make sure the car seat is installed tightly. This means the car seat should not move more than an inch from side-to-side or toward the front of the car.
- Tighten the harness straps so that you cannot pinch any slack in the webbing of the straps.
- Do not add any extra padding, blankets, etc. to the car seat that did not come with the seat or were not approved by the manufacturer.

Infant car seats or carrier seats are an easy way to carry babies. However, these seats can easily tip over, especially if placed on a soft surface, such as a bed or sofa.

Only place infant carriers on the ground, not on countertops, tables, washing machines, etc. Infant car seats should only be used for travel.

# INFANT CARRIERS

Holding a baby makes it hard to do anything else with your hands. For some parents, strap-on infant carriers make it easier to do other things while walking around with their baby.

- If using a carrier, buy one that fits your baby's size and weight. Carefully read the manufacturer's instructions before using the carrier.
- The leg openings should be small enough to prevent your baby from slipping out.
- Look for strong materials and strong fasteners.
- If it has a metal frame, make sure it is covered with padding.
- Always use the safety straps to keep your baby in place.
- When leaning over, bend at the knees to prevent baby from falling out. Do not bend at the waist.

Babies are not ready for a framed **back carrier** until they can sit up on their own and support their head. This does not usually occur until a baby is at least 6 months old.

# SLINGS

In recent years, sling-style infant carriers have become popular. However, parents and caregivers need to be careful when using slings because they can be suffocation hazards. The fabric of the sling can press against a baby's nose and mouth. Additionally, when babies are placed in slings they are often in a curled up position. If your baby's chin is bent toward his chest, he might not be getting enough air and could suffocate. If you use a sling, make sure your baby's head is facing up and there is nothing covering his face. Remember to frequently check on your baby in the sling.



# STROLLERS

Going outside for some fresh air is a fun activity for parents and babies. Keep these things in mind when looking for a stroller:

- Pick a sturdy stroller with a wide base.
- Check that the stroller has brakes that are easy to use.
- If it has a shopping basket, the basket should be low on the back of the stroller.

When using the stroller:

- Use the harness and seat belt every time.
- Do not hang purses or bags on the handles of the stroller. This can cause the stroller to tip over.
- Never leave a child unattended in the stroller.
- Do not let older children hang on the stroller or use it as a play toy.

Playing is a child's favorite job. Parents must make sure the things they are playing with will not injure them.



## BABY WALKERS AND ACTIVITY CENTERS

Over the years, baby walkers have been one of the leading causes of injury to young children. Many parents purchase baby walkers because they think the walkers will be a fun way for their child to learn to walk. However, walkers are very dangerous, and the American Academy of Pediatrics says baby walkers can actually delay when a child starts to walk.

Baby walkers allow children to move very quickly – more than 3 feet a second! This means they can be out of a parent's reach in seconds and can be injured right before a parent's eyes before they even have time to react. Children in baby walkers can race to the stairs and fall down before someone can grab them. Additionally, when in walkers, babies can reach things they otherwise could not, such as hot appliances or poisonous substances.

Baby walkers should NEVER be used. Great alternatives include stationary play centers or playpens.

## PLAYPENS

Playpens are a great place to keep children safe when parents cannot give their full attention to watching the baby. However, there are some things to keep in mind to make sure the playpen is a safe place to play.

- Never leave the side of a mesh playpen down. A baby could become trapped and suffocate in the material.
- As with a crib, hanging toys should be removed from the playpen when your baby is beginning to push up on hands and knees or at 5 months (whichever comes first).
- Once a baby can pull himself up to standing, keep large toys out of the playpen. He might try to climb on these items to get out of the playpen.
- Remove all toys, stuffed animals, and other items before putting a baby down to sleep in a playpen.

## PACIFIERS

- Only purchase pacifiers that cannot come apart. For example, those made of one solid piece of plastic.
- The pacifier should be large enough that it will not fit entirely in your baby's mouth.
- Never tie a pacifier to the crib or around your child's neck or wrist.
- Look at age restrictions for pacifiers. Infant pacifiers are not appropriate for older children.
- Over time, pacifiers might become torn or discolored. If this happens, replace them.



Toy-related injuries are no small problem! Though it is great when babies receive toys as gifts, parents should check that they are safe before giving them to their child.



## TOYS

- Small toys and toys with small parts can cause choking. To check if a part is too small for children younger than 3 years, buy a small parts test device at any toy store. If the toy or part can fit completely in the tube, it is too small.
- Un-inflated balloons or broken balloons can be a serious choking hazard for children younger than 8 years. If swallowed, the latex material can block a child's airway.
- Magnets are also of special concern. They can be very dangerous if swallowed or breathed in. If 2 or more magnets are swallowed, they can attract each other inside the body. This can cause a hole in the intestines or death.
- Good choices for toys for children younger than 1 year would be rattles, soft dolls or stuffed animals (without beaded eyes or any small parts), large blocks, board books, bath toys and teething toys.

## TOY CHESTS

Toy chests are usually filled with fun and exciting things for children. However, many parents might be surprised to realize that toy chests could be dangerous. If the lid does not have a support to hold it open at any angle, it could fall down on top of a child while the child is reaching in. This could cause serious injury, especially if the lid falls on the child's head.

- Look for a toy chest with a lid that comes off or has sliding door panels.
- If the lid has a latch or a freefalling lid, it is not safe.

In addition to the risk of the lid falling, toy chests can also be a source of suffocation. Children might climb inside and shut the lid, trapping themselves inside and cutting off their air supply. To prevent this, use a toy chest with holes or gaps that will allow air to enter even if the lid is closed.

## HIGH CHAIRS

Babies can fall out of high chairs, or the chairs themselves can be tipped or pushed over. Because high chairs are high off the ground, serious injuries can result. Thousands of high chair-related injuries are seen in U.S. emergency departments every year. Most of the injuries are from falls, but strangulation can also occur.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Search for a high chair with a wide base. This will be less likely to tip over.
- Always tightly strap the baby into the high chair. The chair should have straps that go between the legs and around the waist.
- Some parents think that just using the tray will keep their child in place, but this is not true. Without the straps, children can try to stand up, which could lead to the chair tipping over. Children can also slide out of the chair if they are not strapped in, which could cause strangulation or a fall.
- Do not let older brothers or sisters hang on the chair while the baby is in it. This could cause it to tip over.
- Make sure the high chair is right for the child's weight and height.

## BABY GATES

- Install baby gates at the top and bottom of stairs. They can also be used in open doorways to keep babies out of unsafe areas.
- Attach the safety gates with hardware to the wall or banister. Do not use pressure-mounted gates at the tops of stairs.
- Mount the gate no more than 3 ½ inches from the floor. This will prevent a child from getting trapped under the gate.

If you buy a high chair with easy-to-use straps, you will be more likely to buckle your child in every time.



# TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR HOME A SAFER PLACE FOR YOUR FAMILY

In addition to getting the nursery ready, parents should take these steps to make the whole home safer.



Cover all electrical outlets that are not in use with safety covers.



Young children explore their environments by placing things in their mouths. This can lead to injury, especially choking and poisoning.



Cords and strings can be strangulation hazards. Whether they be from blinds, drapes, appliances or even drawstrings on children's clothes, be aware of the danger and keep children away from them.



Keep small items, including marbles, coins, balloons and batteries, away from children. Use a small parts test device to see if a piece is too small for young children. If the piece fits in the tube, it is a choking hazard.



Furniture can tip over more easily than you would guess. Children can pull out drawers and climb up them like steps. Anchor all furniture (book cases, TV's, TV stands, dressers, etc.) to the wall.



Lock any poisonous products, such as cleaners, alcohol, make-up and medicines in cabinets out of reach of young children.



Check home furniture for sharp edges. Consider using cushioned corner protectors on coffee tables, fireplaces or other furniture that might injure young children.



Be aware that purses often have poisons in them. Keep your purse out of your child's reach and remember to have guests do the same.

# TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR HOME A SAFER PLACE FOR YOUR FAMILY



Install safety locks on all cabinets within your child's reach. Remember to lock the cabinets after every use.



If you suspect your child has come in contact with something poisonous, call the Poison Control Center immediately at 1-800-222-1222. Keep this number posted by every phone in the house.



Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your house. Smoke alarms should also be installed in each bedroom and outside all sleeping areas.



Check your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms monthly to make sure they are working. Change the batteries at least once every year. An easy way to remember when to do this is to change them when you change your clocks for daylight savings time in the fall.



Make a fire escape plan for your family. Review and practice your plan at least two times a year. Try your plan at least once at night, too.



Drowning can occur very quickly, silently, and in just inches of water. When bathing a child, an adult (NOT an older sibling) must carefully watch the child at all times. Drowning can occur in the time it takes to answer the phone.



NEVER leave a child alone in the bathtub, even for a second. Some parents think that baby bath seats will keep their child safe, but these seats do NOT prevent drowning. It is recommended to not use baby bath seats.



New parents should learn CPR. When seconds count, knowing CPR can save a life.



Burns and scalds are among the most painful injuries to children. To prevent scalds, set the water heater thermostat to no more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.



To prevent burns, keep children away from the kitchen while cooking and never leave hot irons or appliances unattended around young children. Keep appliance cords out of reach.



Always lock up lighters, matches and chemicals after using them. These items can severely burn children.



The safest place for your child is in a home without a gun. If you have a gun in the home, make sure it is kept unloaded and locked in a place out of sight and out of reach of children. Lock the ammunition in a separate location. Before your child visits friends and relatives, ask if they have guns in their homes and how they store them.

We hope this information has helped you to make your home a safer place for your new baby. For more home safety materials, please visit [www.injurycenter.org](http://www.injurycenter.org)



**THE HOME SAFETY PROGRAM**

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