

The Ins and Outs of Baby Proofing

✘ A mom once told me about a time when she left their toddler in the care of her husband who worked from home.

“Are you sure you can concentrate on your work and watch him?” she asked quizzically.

“No problem,” he said reassuringly.

Hours later, the mom was delighted to come home to a quiet house. She found her husband busy working at his desk. Everything seemed calm. That is, until the mom glanced in the dining room and saw her toddler. Somehow he had scampered to the top of the table and now dangled from the chandelier.

A kid hanging from the chandelier is a parent’s baby proofing nightmare. Out there are an overwhelming number of baby proofing checklists and catalogs of safety devices. But you don’t need to read reams on how to baby proof or spend a fortune on equipment. To baby proof, just roll back to 5th grade and remember your prepositions... those little placement words such as “**IN**, **OUT**, **ON** and **OVER**.” Remember those words? Then you are ready to baby proof. Let’s go.

Drop **DOWN** on your hands and knees and look at your home from your child’s perspective. Start when your child is about six months old, before he can crawl. Because baby proofing is time consuming and it’s tough to take time out of your sleep deprived life, you need to start early, or you may not be done before your child is ready for high school.

Clear play areas of anything which may go **IN** your baby’s mouth and choke or poison him. Anything small enough to fit inside of a toilet paper tube is a potential choking hazard. Don’t leave loose change

lying around on a counter top. Lock caustic and poisonous substances **UP** and **OUT** of reach. Have the Poison Control Center's phone number **BY** the phone in case of accidental ingestion (United States 1-800-222-1222). The clinicians at the Center will instruct you whether or not to go to the emergency room. Do not induce vomiting because the emergency room has more effective ways to detoxify your child and if the ingested substance is caustic, vomit will cause a chemical burn both going **DOWN** and coming back **UP**.

Brain death can occur within five minutes of oxygen deprivation, so anything a child can pull **OVER** or **AROUND** his airway passages is hazardous. Dangling drapery cords, plastic bags, crib bumpers, and loose crib sheets fall into this category. To avoid neck strangulation, bars **ON** cribs and on banisters should be less than 2 3/8 inches apart (the width of a soda can) to prevent a child from trapping his head between them. Do not allow more than two fingerbreadths between the crib frame and the mattress.

All standing water is a potential drowning hazard. Even a large ice bucket at a party poses a risk. Several years ago, one of my neighbor's children toddled up to an ice bucket at a party and right **UNDER** my nose flipped head first **INTO** the icy water.

What goes **UP** must come **DOWN**. An unsteady kid who climbs **UP** the stairs may come tumbling **DOWN**. Gate the top and the bottom of the stairs. Make sure to bolt the top gate into the wall. An angry toddler can break **THROUGH** any pressure secured gate. Walkers are also associated with an increased injury from falls **DOWN** steps. Since walkers do not actually teach your baby to walk any sooner than he would have anyway, just avoid them altogether.

Look also **INSIDE** his crib. Too much soft bedding (crib bumpers and large blankets) are not only suffocation risks but older babies can use the material as a step ladder and climb out. Also ensure that your five month old cannot reach **UP** and pull the mobile **OVER** the crib down **ON** himself.

Outside the crib, your child can still fall **DOWN**, so cushion and move sharp edges (end tables) out of the way. Not just children fall. Furniture which is **UP** may tumble **DOWN ONTO** a child's head. Make sure your excited child reaching for a dancing dinosaur does not pull the television **DOWN**.

Don't allow children to get their hands **ON** a burn hazard. Secure electrical outlets and cords. Set the temperature of hot water to no more than 120 degrees and protect children from the stove and open heating units.

Beware of other people's homes and hotels. Grandparents tend to leave pills within reach of little hands **ON** end tables or **NEAR** bathroom sinks. Once when my family stayed **AT** a hotel, one of my children proudly showed me a pill she found **ON** the floor. "Look mommy at what I found," she said and handed me a pill of Viagra!

Sooner or later children will need to identify potential hazards on their own. Help them understand what is safe. For instance, watch and teach your two year old to "bite then chew" a grape. Practice going **UP** and **DOWN** a few steps at a time and have her always hold the rail.

Of course, nothing is a substitute for adult supervision. But not everything can be anticipated. Sometimes you just have to cross your fingers. When my oldest was 15 months old, my husband was eating an open faced toasted bagel. My daughter toddled up, looked at daddy and scraped her forehead on the hard edge of the bagel.

Maybe we should just cushion children **WITH** pillows and keep helmets **ON** their heads until they go **AWAY** from home.

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