



# From Toddlers to Teens

Safety Tips for Growing Up



University of  
Vermont Health

Golisano  
Children's Hospital



One of the most important things we can be doing for our children is to give them every opportunity to thrive physically and mentally in an environment that fosters their growth and development. While every child is unique in what they need in their specific environment that will allow them to thrive, there is a common theme that is essential to all environments—and that is making sure wherever our children are, they are safe! That is why I am excited to be able to introduce this new volume from Safe Kids Vermont that is a sequel to their *Preparing for Baby* booklet that has been so well-received by so many families and caregivers in our region! This new booklet entitled *From Toddlers to Teens* is designed to share resources and best practices on a variety of essential safety topics applicable to children from age 2 to 19. From farm to firearm safety, from burn to lead prevention, this booklet is a go-to, must-have for any family or caregiver vested in allowing children to be happy, active, resilient, and most importantly safe in a variety of activities and locations.

There is no better way to be “First with your Kids”, as I like to say when I speak to the community, than to promote an environment of safety. Thanks to Safe Kids VT and with gratitude to everyone who helped make this booklet possible, that environment is not only possible but achievable. Whether you read this booklet from cover to cover or have it available as a reference when needed, it will help you create the safest environment possible for your children and for family and other caregivers as well. When you start to read and learn from the various topics discussed in *From Toddlers to Teens*, you’ll see what I mean and have peace of mind that children will be safer as a result of the great information this booklet contains.

Lewis First, MD  
Chief of Pediatrics  
Golisano Children's Hospital at UVM Health

**For parents, grandparents, and other caregivers**  
**2025 Edition**





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**At Home**

# Safe Sleep

## TRANSITIONING FOR TODDLERHOOD AND BEYOND

Most safe sleep guidelines don't go past 1 year of age, but there are still guidelines to follow to help keep your toddler safe as they transition to using bedding.

### TODDLER SLEEP

- If your child is climbing or attempting to climb out of their crib (leg over rail) it is time to transition to a toddler bed or bed.
- Wait until age 2 for pillows and introduce small firm pillows to start.
- Keep beds away from windows, drapery, and electrical cords.
- Children under 2 should not sleep in an adult bed because the mattress can be too soft. A child can also fall off or become trapped between the bed and a wall or bedframe. Children under 15 months of age should never sleep on an air mattress.

#### Did you know?

Stuffed animals and blankets aren't recommended until 15 months or until your child has moved from crib to toddler bed. Consider a toddler size sleep sack as an alternative!

### BED RAILS

- Portable bed rails are not intended for children until they can get out of an adult bed independently, typically between ages 2-5. Gaps in and around rails can entrap and suffocate small children.
- Convertible cribs often come with a bed rail that forms the toddler bed. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to determine the appropriate age of use.
- There are a few portable bed rails, but it's important to ensure they meet safety standards and are designed for toddler beds. They should also be used to keep toddlers from falling out of bed, not to restrain them in bed.

# Bunk Beds

## GUIDELINES

Bunk beds are a great space saver, but it's important that your child uses them safely. An average of 36,000 bunk bed-related injuries occur each year in the U.S. when children are playing on the bunk or being injured during sleep. There are a few ways to help keep them safe.

- Guardrails should be 5 inches or more above the mattress and any added on mattress toppers or pads.
- The top bunk should only be used by kids over the age of 6.
- Position bunk beds in corners with a wall on two sides.
- Keep the top bunk away from ceiling fans and light fixtures.
- Install a night light near the ladder.
- Do not allow children to attach belts, scarves, ropes, or the like to the bunk bed.



## Sleep Hygiene

According to the CDC, children and teens who do not sleep enough are at increased risk for obesity, diabetes, injuries, poor mental health, and issues with attention and behavior.

How much sleep is enough? The following guidelines are recommended with a 24-hour period.



- 1-2 year olds should sleep 11-14 hours.
- 3-5 year olds should sleep 10-13 hours.
- 6-12 year olds should sleep 9-12 hours.
- 13-18 year olds should sleep 8-10 hours.

Sleep hygiene tips to improve sleep include:

- Have a consistent sleep schedule. Kids should go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day, even on the weekends.
- Limit technology and screen exposure before bed.
- Be active during the day.
- Create a soothing sleep environment that is quiet, dark, and a comfortable temperature.

**Did you know?** Puberty can cause the internal clock to shift about 2 hours. So your teen who went to sleep at 9 pm, may not feel tired until 11 pm. This can also mean they need to sleep in longer in the mornings by 2 hours as well.

# Falls Prevention

## AROUND THE HOUSE

- Stairs are a common location of falls. Keep the stairs cleared of clutter. For young children, install anchored safety gates at the top of the stairs and anchored or tension safety gates at the bottom.
- If you have a wooden staircase, check out treads or nonslip sprays that can increase traction.
- Encourage kids to always hold on to the railing when going up or down stairs.
- Check your rugs to make sure they have non-slip backs or non-slip tape to keep the edges down.
- Use a nonslip bath mat in the tub or get some cute nonslip stickers.
- Keep the electrical cords tucked away against the wall or behind furniture.
- Wear slippers or house shoes with nonslip soles instead of bare feet or socks.

## WINDOW FALLS

- When possible, open windows from the top instead of the bottom.
- If you must open them from the bottom, install window guards that only an adult or older child can open from the inside that prevent the window from opening more than 4 inches.
- A screen is designed to keep bugs out, not children in. You can purchase and install fall prevention devices such as window guards.
- Keep furniture away from windows, such as chairs, sofas, or tables, that a child could climb to gain access to the window.





## Lead Poisoning Prevention

Lead is a highly toxic heavy metal. Before being banned in 1978, lead-based paint was widely used on the exterior and interior of homes. Lead-based paint in and around your home can be a serious health issue. Too much lead in the body can cause serious and lifelong health problems for anyone, but

pregnant women and children under age 6 are especially at risk because their bodies absorb higher amounts of lead. Health effects of exposure to lead include physical, neurological, developmental issues, and potentially death. Children can be lead poisoned by ingesting lead dust, eating paint chips, or by chewing on surfaces painted with lead-based paint. As we know, children put everything in their mouths!

### Blood Lead Level Testing

Vermont law requires all children ages 1 and 2 to have their blood lead level tested. It is good practice to continue checking your child's blood lead level until age 6 if living in a pre-1978 home. If your child has not been tested for lead in their blood, talk to your child's health care provider about scheduling a lead test as soon

as possible. If you think your child has been exposed to lead (no matter their age), contact your child's health care provider to schedule a test. Most children who have high levels of lead in their blood have no symptoms. The only way to tell if your child has an elevated level is with a blood test.



## PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM LEAD PAINT HAZARDS



Lead-based paint hazards found in paint chips, dust, and soil in and around your home can be dangerous. Opening and closing windows and doors painted with lead-based paint creates invisible dust. This dust commonly settles on window sills, window wells, and floors. Regular cleaning of certain areas in your home will help keep your family healthy and safe from lead dust.

Lead risks and concerns will evolve with the development of your child. Children 1-18 months are not very mobile, but have constant hand-to-mouth activity. It is very important to wash your children's hands and be careful of what surfaces they are in contact with. Always wash your children's hands prior to napping and eating. Wash dropped pacifiers and teething toys before giving them back to children. Be thoughtful of where you place a child's bed or play area, and make sure it is not near lead-paint windows or doorways, or painted floors where lead-paint dust or flakes could be produced. That also goes for children who are older and becoming more mobile. Be cautious of what surfaces your child could be touching or may be chewing. If there are any areas of paint that are deteriorated, make sure to stabilize and cover that area as soon as possible. If any person in the household is exposed to lead or other hazardous materials in their workplace, make sure to dispose of clothes safely and clean as much skin surface as you can before handling your child.

Outdoor play is an area of lead exposure that tends to be overlooked. Around your property, look for areas of deteriorated paint and dispose of any paint chips and flakes that are in the yard. Keep children away from playing near exterior walls that could contain lead-paint debris. Even soil can contain lead. Cover bare soil with vegetation, mulch or

stone and provide a play area such as a sandbox. It is helpful to have a designated outdoor play area in a safe location. If you are concerned about lead being in your soil, you can contact the Burlington Lead Program for more information about soil testing.

There may be items in your home that you do not realize contain lead. Other sources of lead can be from everyday household items, toys, traditional medicines, spices and more. In the United States, lead in plastics has not been banned, exposing children to lead through toys. Many older antiques and collectible toys may contain or be painted in lead. Other items like ceramic glazes, bullets, imported



crayons, and even countertop glaze, may contain lead. Always be aware of what your child is coming in contact with and what they are putting in their mouths. Check out [www.cpsc.gov/Recalls](http://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls) to see what items in the United States have been recalled because of lead.

### **The Vermont Lead Law and You**

The Vermont Lead Law requires property owners of pre-1978 rental homes and owners of child-care facilities to complete yearly inspections on their properties to help prevent children from being exposed to lead-based paint hazards. Please visit [www.burlingtonvt.gov/blp](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/blp) for more information about these requirements. If you are a renter, notify your property owner if you see any cracking, chipping, flaking, or damaged paint on the inside and/or outside of the building. If your landlord does not address your concerns of lead hazards in your household, consider reporting a violation to the Vermont Department of Health at 802-863-7200 or to Burlington Code Enforcement at 802-863-0442.

# Preventing Lead Exposure

## TIPS FOR CLEANING YOUR HOME

If you are concerned there may be lead paint in your home, follow these cleaning tips to reduce the health impact on your family.

- Always wash your children's hands prior to napping and eating.
- Wash dropped pacifiers and teething toys before giving them back to children.
- Clean floors, toys, toy boxes, pacifiers, tables, and areas where food is often eaten or prepared daily.
- Window sills, window wells, tops of baseboards, and any other trim detail or furniture where dust collects should be cleaned weekly; preferably, with gloved hands.
- Pick up and throw away any visible paint chips in child-accessible areas immediately; remember to wash your hands afterwards.
- Use disposable single-use cleaning materials to avoid spreading lead dust to other areas; replace mop pads, sponges, and rags frequently.
- Use wet mops instead of dry sweeping (which moves lead dust around rather than removing it), and a HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) vacuum (which differs from a regular vacuum in that they contain finer filters) if available. If you do not own a HEPA vacuum, borrow one from the Burlington Lead Program for free!

## TIPS FOR HOME RENOVATION

### Assume Paint is Lead-Based

- When working on a building constructed before 1978, presume that all paints and coatings are lead-based (Vermont law).
- Vermont does not recognize the use of swab test kits for paint testing. Always use Lead-Safe Work Practices.
- Prevent unauthorized access to lead work areas.
- Contain the work area with plastic sheeting.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing and equipment, such as a Tyvek suit and respirator.
- Mist or wet down painted surfaces before disturbing paint.
- Wash hands and leave protective clothing away from living areas.
- Always wash your children's hands prior to napping and eating.
- Wash dropped pacifiers and teething toys before children's use.
- Use the methods for cleaning areas under renovation that are described on the previous page.



### Avoid These Prohibited Work Practices

- Open flame burning or torching
- Use of heat guns operating at or above 1,100 deg. F
- Dry scraping or dry sanding
- Use of powered sanding or grinding tools
- Hydro-blasting or high-pressure washing
- Abrasive blasting or sandblasting
- Chemical stripping

## HOW BURLINGTON LEAD CAN HELP

In Burlington and Winooski, 80% of homes contain lead-based paint. Free educational and technical site visits are available for both owner-occupied homes and rentals. Enrolling in the BLP provides you with free lead paint testing and a risk assessment of all painted surfaces, with the potential of free lead hazard reduction home improvements such as new windows and exterior paint. Work is paid for through grants and interest-free deferred loans with the possibility of 100% forgiveness. To find out if you are eligible contact, Burlington Lead.

**Call**

**802-865-5323**

**E-mail**

[blp@burlingtonvt.gov](mailto:blp@burlingtonvt.gov)

**Visit**

[burlingtonvt.gov/blp](http://burlingtonvt.gov/blp)

For properties outside of Burlington and Winooski contact the Vermont Housing Conservation Board Healthy & Lead-Safe Homes Program at 802-828-5064 or visit their website.





## Reducing Home Fire Risks

Did you know that 3 out of 5 fire deaths happen in home without working smoke alarms? And once a smoke alarm sounds, you may only have 1 or 2 minutes to escape? Preparing your home and practicing what to do when the alarm sounds can protect you and your family if a fire occurs.

### Be “Alarmed”

- Install smoke alarms in every sleeping room, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level of the home. Install alarms in the basement. Larger homes may require additional smoke alarms to provide a minimum level of protection.
- Install carbon monoxide (CO) alarms outside each separate sleeping area, on every level of the home, and in other locations as required by laws, codes, or standards.
- Test smoke and CO alarms at least once a month using the test button located on the alarm.
- Make sure everyone in the home understands the sound of the smoke alarm and knows how to respond.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning to keep smoke and CO alarms working.
- Replace all alarms when they are 10 years old.

## Have an Escape Plan

Did you know that 71% of people have a home fire escape plan, but less than half practice it? It's important after creating your plan, to practice it regularly, especially with younger children to help them remember and hopefully stay calmer in an emergency.



- Make a home escape plan. Draw a map of each level of the home. Show all doors and windows. Practice the plan with everyone in your home.
- Know at least two ways out of every room, if possible. Make sure all doors and windows that lead outside open.
- Have an outside meeting place (something permanent, like a tree, light pole, or mailbox) a safe distance in front of the home where firefighters will easily find you.

## Burn Prevention

- Keep young children 3 feet away from anything that can get hot. Space heaters, grills, and stovetops can cause terrible burns.
- Make sure young children cannot reach the microwave. Children as young as 17 months can open a microwave, putting them at risk for serious scalds or steam burns. In fact, more than 7,000 children under the age of 5 were treated for microwave-related burns in the U.S. from 2002 to 2012.
- Place items so they cannot be pulled down or knocked over. Keep appliance cords coiled and away from counter edges.
- Keep smoking materials locked up in a high place. Never leave lighters or matches where children can reach them.
- Teach kids to use oven mitts or potholders to remove items from the oven, stove, or microwave.
- Teach teens to smother a grease fire and never to pour water on it.

# Babysitters

## HOW TO FIND AND PREPARE

Finding a babysitter can seem overwhelming. It can be difficult to leave your child with a person who isn't you to care for them. Luckily, there are some steps you can take to make sure you have found the babysitter right for you and your family.

- 1) Recommendations! Ask friends or neighbors for recommendations for babysitters they have used and liked. Look for reviews and recommendations from local families on sites like Facebook parent groups or front porch forum.
- 2) Set up a meeting with the babysitter ahead of time. You can ask for references to check with and about their experience and training. Consider someone who has gone through a babysitting course or clinic, such as a 4-H or American Red Cross offering. Confirm they have had first aid training and know CPR.

\*It's recommended babysitters be at least 13 years old and mature enough to handle common emergencies.

## PREPARING THE BABYSITTER

To help your child and babysitter have the best experience together, consider having the babysitter spend time with them while you are home so they can learn their personalities and routines. Here are other ideas for you to consider:

- Give the babysitter a tour of the house.
- Educate the sitter on any special medical needs your child might have, such as allergies, and what to do if a medical emergency occurs.
- Share your family fire escape plan and where emergency supplies, like flashlights or first aid kits, are kept.
- Write out or discuss your child's feeding, bathing, and sleeping preferences as well as where key items are stored.
- If the babysitter will be transporting your child, install their car seat or booster seat in their car.

# Staying Home Alone

## WHEN ARE THEY READY

There is no magical age when a child is ready to be home alone safely. It is very dependent on the child. Unlike some other states, Vermont does not have an age restriction law.

However, leaving a child who is too young home alone can still be considered neglect.

So how do you know if they are ready to stay home alone?



According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, you should ask yourself the following questions.

- Is your child physically and mentally able to care for themselves?
- Does your child obey rules and make good decisions?
- How does your child respond to unfamiliar or stressful situations?
- Does your child feel comfortable or fearful about being home alone?

You can also consider if your child has the safety skills they need to stay home alone.

- Can your child follow a safety plan for emergencies?
- Do they know their full name, address, and phone number?
- Does your child know how to contact you, other trusted adults, or 9-1-1 in case of an emergency?
- Can they fix themselves a snack or meal?
- Do they know how to lock or secure the doors?

Have a discussion with your child about being home alone. See how they feel about being ready. Work together to establish rules for what is allowed or not allowed when you aren't home. Identify some activities they can engage in while home alone.

And remember, not all situations of being left home alone are the same. Will you be next door at the neighbor's for a short visit during the day? Will you be out of town for several hours at night? (It's recommended not to leave them home alone overnight until they are in their later teenage years!)

Consider having a trial run where you leave your child home alone for a short amount of time where you can be close by and easily contacted.

When you get home, be sure to check in with your child. How was their experience while you were gone? Did they have any concerns or issues?

It's important to work with your child to make sure you are both comfortable as you go through the process of increasing their independence by staying home without you.



# On the Farm

## Age-Appropriate Farm Safety



Farms can be filled with hazards for children that are not always obvious. The real struggle for most family farms is that it is both a home and a workplace in one. Most of the work areas are not age-appropriate for young children and can put them at risk for injury or death.

Your local Extension Office will have additional information

and is an excellent resource to reach out to when it comes to keeping kids safe around farm equipment and agricultural hazards.

For young children, it is important to prevent them from accessing the farm worksite. This can be done by arranging off-site childcare or building a safe play area around the home. Physical barriers like fences are key to keeping curious kids out of water hazards, separate from animals, and away from machinery such as tractors.

As kids grow up, provide them with opportunities to work on the farm in a way that is appropriate for their age, size, and development. Children and young teens often are unable to identify and avoid hazard circumstances nor be able to react quickly to the danger. There are many guides online that layout what jobs are appropriate by age, skill, and the adult supervision required to keep kids safe while they are completing those age-appropriate tasks.

Get your child involved in FFA or 4-H where they can learn and build their own skills for working around the farm safely.



## Preventing Poisoning

### MEDICATIONS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Many common items in and around your home may be poisonous. The most common things young children get into medications, vitamins and supplements, cleaning products, personal care products like lotions and toothpaste, plants and mushrooms, and pesticides like ant traps and bug spray. Some of the most serious poisonings involve prescription pain medications, cannabis, and ADHD medications.

As children get older, the risk may shift from accidental poisoning to intentional self-poisoning. Fortunately, safe storage tips for medications and other household products can help prevent both.

Save the Poison Center contact information in your phone. The Poison Center is staffed by specially trained nurses and pharmacists who provide fast, expert, free help. With this help, 95% of poisonings involving young children can be treated at home.

**Call**

**1-800-222-1222\***

**Text**

**POISON to  
85511**

**Chat**

**[www.nnepc.org](http://www.nnepc.org)**

\* This is a national number.

## TIPS FROM THE NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND POISON CENTER

Preparation and good habits can help you prevent poisonings in your home, for both children and adults. Here are some tips:

- Store all medications, including over-the-counter products and prescriptions, behind a lock, such as in a lock box or cabinet. Keep purses, luggage, and backpacks out of reach of young children.
- Store non-food items separately from all food and drink.
- Do not call medication “candy.”
- Properly dispose of unused medications at a police station, pharmacy or take-back event. Avoiding purchasing medications in bulk sizes to limit the risk of overdosing.
- Monitor your child’s medications at home, including prescriptions and over-the-counter products.
- Ask the parents of friends how and where they store their medications, marijuana, and alcohol.
- Go to the emergency department immediately after a self-poisoning attempt. Don’t wait for medical treatment, even if your child looks fine.



## YOUTH SELF-POISONING



In Vermont, self-poisoning among teenagers is increasing. From 2020 to 2021, emergency department visits for self-harm increased 4 times for middle school students and 3 times for high school students. In fact, 41% of hospital visits for self-harm are from poisoning.

You play an important role in protecting and supporting your child and their mental health. You may not feel

prepared to recognize the warning signs for self-harm and suicide, or to know how to offer your teen the support they need, whether they are having a rough day or struggling with their mental health.

First, always take your child’s threats of suicide or self-harm seriously. Never dismiss them as “typical teenage behavior.” Impulsive self-poisoning attempts can occur with no history of mental illness.

Second, there are many resources to help you be there for them. Check out #BeThe1To at [bethe1to.com](https://bethe1to.com) and visit the Vermont Department of Mental Health at [mentalhealth.vermont.gov](https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov).

### **Common self-poisoning substances:**

Over-the-counter pain relievers  
Antidepressants  
Antihistamines  
ADHD medications  
Anti-anxiety medications

### **Dangers from self-poisoning:**

Stomach upset, diarrhea, vomiting  
Hallucinations  
Agitation  
Extreme drowsiness  
Heart issues  
Liver failure  
Seizures  
Death

# Dog-Smart Bite Prevention

## Quiz to Keep Kids Safe

When it comes to keeping kids safe around dogs, it is key to teach toddlers and school-age kids the safest way to behave around dogs. Practicing this quiz regularly can help keep your kids safer around family pets, dogs at friends' houses, or even around the neighborhood.

**Question:** Who do we need to ask to say hi to a dog?

**Answer:** We ask an adult and we ask the dog!

**Why for Parents:** Not all dogs want to be greeted or petted. The dog might not be in the mood to play and the owner of a dog will be able to let you know ahead of time to not approach their dog.



**Question:** How do we say hi to a dog?

**Answer:** We call them over and let them sniff you!

**Why for Parents:** Dogs can be shy and prefer to approach people and kids then having people approach them first.



**Question:** When a dog is eating their food or chewing a toy, do we go up to them or do we leave them alone?

**Answer:** We leave them alone!

**Why for Parents:** Some dogs don't want to share their food or toys and if you approach them while eating or playing they may growl or bite to protect it.



**Question:** If a dog is sleeping, do we go up to them or do we leave them alone?

**Answer:** We leave them alone!

**Why for Parents:** No one likes to be bothered when they are asleep. A dog who is startled while sleeping may snap or bite.

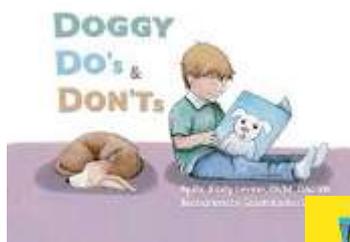
**Question:** Should we climb, lie on, or ride a dog?

**Answer:** No, we might hurt or scare the dog!

**Why for Parents:** Climbing, laying on, or riding a dog can cause the dog pain, scare them, or startle them. When dogs are surprised or in pain, it might lead to a bite. Find a game that is safe and enjoyable for both your children and the dog, such as fetch.

## MORE RESOURCES

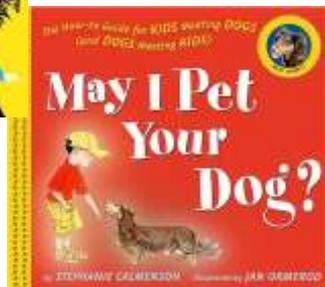
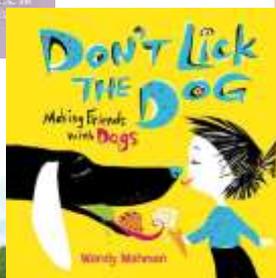
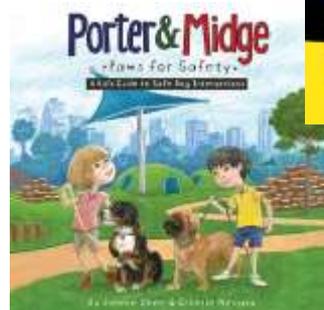
There are also picture books you can read with your kids that are also focused on dog safety messages. Sometimes kids are more receptive to learning from a fun book format.



Joanne Hinds  
**ASK THE DOG**



Illustrated by Scott Hinds



# Firearm Safety

## Cardinal Rules of Firearm Safety

1. Keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
2. Treat every gun as if it were loaded.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger and out of the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.
4. Be sure of your target, what is in front of it, and what is beyond it.

## How to talk about Firearm Safety



Begin teaching children about firearm safety when they first show awareness of or interest in guns. This will vary depending on age, family interest/use of firearms, etc.

Teach children that guns, even toy guns, are not to be treated as a toy.

Set a good example with your own safe gun handling practices and go above and beyond to explain safety around children.

Be sure your child knows that it is never okay to handle a firearm without an adult present.

Teach your child to treat every gun as if it is loaded, and always point the muzzle in a safe direction. Never point a gun at a person, even a toy gun. Begin instilling firearm safety principles with toy guns. For example, get the child their own “gun safe” for their toy firearm, and start practicing the cardinal rules of firearm safety.

If your child sees an unattended firearm, tell them to do the following:

- Stop.
- Do not touch the gun, even if it looks like a toy.
- Leave the area.
- Tell an adult right away.

These same rules of firearm safety should be followed with BB guns, airsoft guns, paintball guns, and pellet guns. Practice regular firearm safety, muzzle control, and trigger discipline with sticks, hoses with triggers, etc.

Every time a gun is handled, be sure it is unloaded by opening the chamber (action), and visually checking that there is no ammunition loaded in the chamber.

Each time someone hands you a firearm, check the following:

- Is the gun unloaded?
- Is the safety on?
- Is the action (or chamber) open?



Once you can say yes to those three questions, you can safely take the firearm from the other person.

Do not mix guns and alcohol or judgement impairing drugs. This includes legal medications, recreational drugs, and illegal drugs.

Take a firearm safety course, such as those conducted by Scouts, NRA, a local shooting club, etc.

Make sure children know that if they ever see something unsafe involving a firearm, they should remove themselves from the situation and tell an adult they trust or call 911.

At the end of the day, no matter what they are taught in school or at firearm safety courses, most children's behavior around firearms will reflect what the adults in their lives model to them on a regular basis. Have regular conversations about firearms. Make sure that you are ready to answer questions and always model the safest behavior around firearms both in and out of the home.

### **Safe Firearm Storage**

- Store firearms unloaded and locked with the ammunition locked and stored separately.
- Adults are responsible for proper storage and handling of firearms.
- Store firearms behind a lock and keep the key location and access code a secret.
- Youth should never have unsupervised access to firearms, even if they have experience with firearms.
- Teach children to inform an adult if an unsecured firearm is found at home, a friend's house, or anywhere.

Some families decide that storing firearms outside of the home for a time is best. Learn more about options for voluntary, temporary storage facilities for firearms throughout Vermont at [vsp.vermont.gov/licensing/firearmstorage](https://vsp.vermont.gov/licensing/firearmstorage).

# Healthy Relationships

## PREVENTING RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

It is never too early to talk with your teen about healthy relationships



or dating violence. Just as in adult relationships, teenage relationships can be healthy, unhealthy, or even abusive. Healthy relationships are built on equality, respect, trust, and safety. Abusive relationships are based on power and control, and may involve coercion, isolation, peer pressure, or intimidation.

It is important to create an environment that encourages open dialogue with your teen about relationships. Even if your

teen isn't dating, talking about friendships, peer relationships, and even media examples can help build a foundation of openness and trust. Some conversation starters to use with your child include:

- What qualities are important to you in a friendship? What about in a dating relationship?
- What things about a romantic relationship that appeal to you? What aspects of a romantic relationship do not appeal to you?
- What is important to have in common with your partner? What is it okay to disagree on?
- How do you go about handling conflict? What do you think a healthy way of handling conflict looks like? What about unhealthy ways to handle conflict?
- How do you think power shows up in relationships? Can you think of relationships that have a balance of power? How about an unbalance of power?

If your teen does disclose that they are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, the following things are important to remember when talking about the relationship.

**Be open and willing to listen.** Hearing about relationship violence is tough, especially when it is happening to a child you love. It is a big step for someone to disclose they are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. Be open to hearing as much or as little as they would like to share.

**Validate their feelings.** Those experiencing dating violence may feel like they are at fault or have been told that it is not really abuse. Reassure them that what they are experiencing is real and they are not to blame.

**Withhold judgement.** Empower your teen to make decisions about their relationship. While you may have more experience in relationships, they are the experts on their situation and know what is best for them. Do not shame them for staying in the relationship.

**Don't give up.** Continue keeping lines of communication open. Your teen might not be ready to make a change in their relationship right now but will know that you are a support for them if and when they do decide to seek help. Provide them with information and resources, such as this list from the Vermont Agency of Human Services [humanservices.vermont.gov/help-and-resources/domestic-violence](https://humanservices.vermont.gov/help-and-resources/domestic-violence) and let them know you will be there for them no matter what.







**At Play**

# Sports Safety

Sports are a great way to keep kids active and often may have benefits from teaching teamwork to improving self-esteem. However, it is important to set children up for success and minimize their risk for injury while playing.



- Children should wear the correct safety gear and equipment. Besides having the right gear for the sport, make sure it fits your child properly. It may be tempting to buy a size bigger for them to grow into but a proper fit keeps them safer.
- Children should be supervised and taught by an adult who knows the safety rules for the sport. Kids are more likely to get injured when they don't know how to play a sport safely. A good coach or adult is key to helping them learn and play in a way that keeps them and their teammates and opponents safe.
- Ensure kids get plenty of fluids during and after their activities. Dehydration can cause dizziness and fatigue, which can increase the risk of injury or illness.



## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSIONS

Symptoms of concussions can range from being hard-to-see to quite obvious. The general signs include:

- Loss of consciousness
- Slurred speech
- New anxiety/depression
- Appearing dazed, confused
- Balance problems/clumsiness
- Blurred vision
- Changes to sleep
- Delayed response to questions
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Forgetfulness
- Foggy feeling
- Headaches
- Irritability
- Light and sound sensitivity
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Ringing in the ears
- Unusual behavior

All concussions should be taken seriously. If your child loses



consciousness, is vomiting repeatedly, or starts to slur their words, seek medical attention immediately. Even if the symptoms seem mild, it is important to have them evaluated by a health care professional. Please remember, all concussions are brain injuries. While most people will recover from symptoms within a few weeks, some may experience symptoms for

months or longer. Talk to your child's health care team about when the child can return to school, sports, and other activities.

# SPORTS SAFETY: HELMETS

## WHY HELMETS ARE IMPORTANT

Helmets can reduce the risk of a serious brain or head injury, such as a concussion or traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The catch? Helmets only work if they are used the right way. It's important to always use a helmet specifically designed for the activity. Each sport or activity has a helmet designed specifically for the injuries participants are at risk for so no one should wear a bike helmet to play football or a skiing helmet to mountain climb.

Even when wearing a helmet, children should follow the rules of their activity to help keep them safe.



## WHO SHOULD WEAR A HELMET?

Everyone taking part in an activity that puts them at increased risk for a head injury. Adults and children of all ages should wear a helmet

when biking, skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding, horseback riding, and other similar activities

Studies have shown that when adults wear helmets, children are much more likely to wear theirs when riding a bike. It is important to set a good example and wear a helmet whenever you want your child to wear one too.



## HOW TO CLEAN A HELMET

The first step is to remove any removable pads before cleaning. To clean the helmet, use mild soaps like baby shampoo, gentle dish soap, or a mild laundry detergent. Do not soak the helmet in a sink or bucket of water. Instead use a warm wet towel to clean off any stuck on bugs or grime. You can rest the wet towel on the helmet to loosen up the dirt. After you've cleaned the helmet, let it air dry.

Do not expose the helmet to chemicals or solvents. The protective materials of the helmet can react badly to harsh chemicals, such as bleach, which can weaken the helmet's ability to protect your head.

## WHEN TO REPLACE A HELMET

Most helmets are designed for a single impact. Once someone takes a hit to the head, it's time to replace the helmet. Even if the helmet looks fine, there can be internal damage which would prevent it from providing proper protection next time. This is also why you never want to buy a used helmet. It's almost impossible to know if a helmet already protected a head from a fall or impact unless it's new.



Football and similar style helmets should be reconditioned and re-certified after the second year of use, then every other year after.

Not many people realize it, but helmets expire and need to be replaced every few years. Most manufacturers will place a sticker with the date of expiration or the date of manufacturing. Most companies recommend you replace bike, ATV, riding, ski, and skateboard helmets every 3 to 5 years. For baseball and football helmets, it may be closer to every 10 years depending on the condition (or 6 1/2 for hockey!).

For children, it may be necessary to replace helmets annually to ensure it fits properly on your growing child!

## Playground Safety

When playing on public playgrounds, choose equipment that is appropriate for the age and development of your child. Look for playgrounds that have an impact absorbing surface such as wood chips, sand, or rubber matting rather than hard surfaces like grass or asphalt. You should also look over the play structure for sharp points or edges. Loose nails and screws, rust or peeling paint, can all be potential hazards. The best way to prevent playground injuries is through adult guidance and active supervision.



Other tips include:

- Check the slides, metal and plastic, for temperature on hot, sunny days to prevent burns.
- Teach children to go down the slide feet first and by themselves. It is not safe to go down slides with your children.
- Dress your children without drawstrings, scarves, or necklaces, which can get caught on equipment. Avoid letting them play with or around items that could become a strangulation hazard, such as jump ropes, pet leashes, or helmets.



## Harmful Plants

When playing outside, young children might be tempted to put harmful plants or berries in their mouth while exploring. Older teens may make a mistake trying to identify a safe plant from a harmful look-a-like.



Sometimes, kids are confused that only part of a plant is safe to eat. For example, rhubarb stalks can be eaten, but the leaves are poisonous.

Below is a list of plants that can be harmful to people or pets. The list shows examples and is not meant to be a comprehensive of all harmful plants, berries, or vegetation.

### Harmful Outdoor Plants

- Baneberry/snake berry
- Buttercup
- Daffodil/narcissus
- Elderberry
- False hellebore/Indian poke
- Foxglove
- Hyacinth
- Iris
- Lily-of-the-valley
- Nightshades
- Poison hemlock
- Pokeweed/pokeberry
- Rhododendron
- Rhubarb (leaves)

Supervision outside is important to stop curious little hands from eating berries and weeds that can make them sick. If you have a yard or outdoor space, check whether you have any poisonous or harmful plants are present and remove them.

For older kids, encourage them to learn about foraging with guidance from an expert and to always double check identification with someone else. If they aren't 100% sure what a plant, mushroom, or berry is, they should not eat it.

# Technology and Internet Safety

## CELL PHONES

The big question is, when should I get my child a cell phone? The age is not the same for every child. When considering a cell phone for your child, ask yourself these questions:



- How do you plan for your child to use the phone?
- How would your child most likely use the phone?
- Do you have any concerns about your child having a phone or constant access to the internet and social media?
- What do you see as a responsible phone user and how can your child show you they are being responsible?
- Do you have a way to check in with them about their digital life?

If you decide your child is ready for a phone, review the features available to help your child be a safe phone and media user. These features include parental controls, settings, timers, and other parenting apps. You should set up these features together with your child so they understand what is being added and why. As the child shows responsibility and gets older, these features can be removed or turned off.

With a first cell phone, it's important to make a family media plan. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends family media plans to set media priorities and balance screen time. You can create a plan on their website at [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org).

Remember, if you look at your phone while eating together or hanging out, don't be surprised when your child does the same.

## SOCIAL MEDIA



When starting to give your child independence online and with social media, it's important to provide them with guidance on how to keep safe on the internet. Here are some key tips to share with your child.

- Learn how to identify safe websites from unsafe websites.
- Create unique passwords that you can remember and can keep

secret from anyone except your parents. The safest passwords avoid real words and use a mix of numbers and symbols. Each account should have a unique password.

- Use privacy settings on websites and social media accounts to protect your information. Security settings can control who can and can't see your information and also limits what information an app or website collects about you. Location-sharing is a feature that can be safe or harmful depending on how it's used.
- Consider what you are sharing or posting online. Not only does personal information stay online forever, but so do the negative things you might post. It's important to not only protect yourself, but consider the impact of what is posted.

Encourage your child to speak up if they find questionable content. New internet users are likely to stumble upon questionable content or deal with strange or bad online behavior. Making sure your child feels comfortable coming to you about it helps keep them safer online.

## VIDEO GAMES



Online games can be a great way for kids to communicate with friends and improve teamwork and problem solving skills. At the same time, many online games expose players to issues such as racism, sexism, and harassment. The following tips can help you help your child enjoy the positives of gaming while staying safer.

- Be aware of what they are playing and who they are playing with.
- Check game ratings and read reviews and descriptions to determine whether a game is age-appropriate. You can also to better understand the content and messaging within a game.
- Make sure to know how they are speaking and what topics are being brought up. The easiest way to monitor conversations is to set the game up to speakers instead of headphones, that way you can listen to both sides of the conversation. It's important for you to talk with your child what topics are appropriate and inappropriate for talking with friends, especially online.
- Talk to your child about being respectful. It is easy to fall into the toxic behavior in some online games. Remind your child that even if they can't see them, they are still playing with real people with real feelings.
- Watch for in-app or in-game spending. Kids may be tempted to spend real money for benefits in-game, such as custom skins or early access to game items. Check to see if you can password lock or turn off in-game purchases.
- When possible, try to play together! Even if you aren't into games, playing with your child can be a great way to bond.

## CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying can occur across any digital device or platform. It can be direct, like cruel text messages or comments, or indirect like posting a video or personal information online to hurt or embarrass someone.

Children and teens don't always want to admit to being cyberbullied for fear they will lose access to their devices or the internet. There are behavioral changes you can look for if you are concerned your child is dealing with cyberbullying.

- Being upset, nervous, or jumpy before or after using the internet or when receiving a message
- Being overly protective of devices or accounts
- Withdrawing or showing lack of interest in friends and hobbies
- Avoiding school or group gatherings
- Changes in mood, behavior, sleep, grades, or attitude

There are ways you can support your child and potentially protect them from future bullying.

- Provide your child with comfort or support and let them know you are there to support them in figuring out what to do next.
- Talk to the school and find out their role in responding to cyberbullying and how they can protect your child.
- Work with your child to stop responding to the bully or blocking them on platforms.
- Keep records of the bullying, such as screen shots, for when working with the school, other parents, or even law enforcement.
- Like with any type of bullying, having your child meet with a counselor or therapist can be very helpful in supporting their emotional well being.

## Playdate Safety

Checking in with the other parent or caregiver prior to a playdate may feel awkward, but it is important for setting up a successful playdate. A playdate check-in can let you and your child know about household rules or expectations for where they are going as well as an opportunity to share details about your child, like allergies.

Here are 5 questions the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends you ask before a playdate and why!

1) Who will be watching the kids?

**Why?** You may assume a parent will be watching the kids, but it might be an older sibling or other relative. Knowing who will be in the house, especially for a sleepover, allows you to determine your comfort with your child being there.

2) Are there pets in the house?

**Why?** Children are frequently victims of animal bites. Learning about pets and their behavior prior to a playdate can ensure you feel safe sending your child over. Additionally, it can be an opportunity to let the other parent or caregiver know if your child is nervous or scared around any particular animals.



3) Do you have a swimming pool, trampoline, or any other things that are potentially unsafe?

**Why?** Both require adult supervision. Children under age 5 should never be in or around water unless within arm's reach of an adult and older kids should be supervised too. Trampolines cause thousands of injuries every year. It is recommended if they are used at home, supervising adults limit jumpers to one at a time

4) What are your rules about screen media use?

**Why?** Rules may differ on how much screen time or what ratings for movies or video games is allowed. If you prefer your child not playing games or watching movies over a certain rating you can let them know.

5) Do you have guns in your home? If so, how are they stored?

**Why?** Approximately 1/3 of homes with children have a gun. Many of these guns are stored unlocked or loaded. An accessible gun and curious children can lead to terrible tragedies. If you are uncomfortable with how the firearms are stored, offer to host the playdate at your home instead.



# Water Safety

## PREVENTING UNINTENTIONAL DROWNING

Did you know adolescents (15-19 years old) have the 2nd highest fatal drowning rate out of any age group? Only toddlers (ages 12-36 months) have a higher risk.

Drowning is often silent. Avoid distractions when your child is around water by putting away phones, avoiding lengthy conversations, or multitasking.

### Natural Water

- Use only Coast Guard Approved Flotation. Avoid inflatable swimming aids such as “floaties.” They are not a substitute for approved life jackets and can give children and parents a false sense of security.
- Choose a Water Watcher – when several adults are present, choose one to be solely responsible for watching children in the water.
- Do not use alcohol or drugs around the water, especially when supervising others. Alcohol is a leading risk factor in drownings. In fact, alcohol contributes to 30-70% of teen recreational water (swimming or boating) deaths in the U.S.
- Require your child to swim within designated areas that are within sight of certified lifeguards and guardians.
- Be cautious of cold water, especially during warm spring days. Cold water exposure can cause cold shock, increasing the risk of severe injury, drowning, and death.

## Cold Shock

- Involuntary gasping, rapid breathing, or hyperventilating.
- Spike in heart rate and blood pressure.
- Cognitive impairment due to panic, stress, and hypothermia.

## POOLS AND HOT TUBS

- When using an inflatable/ portable pool, empty it immediately after use and store it upside down out of children's reach.
- Depending on when your pool was installed, find out if your drains and other suction are fitted with anti-entrapment covers or safety vacuum-release systems.
- A fence at least four feet tall should surround the pool or hot tub on all sides and have a self-closing, self-latching gate.
- Install a door alarm to let you know when your child accesses the backyard without your supervision.



## WATER SAFETY SKILLS

Sign up for swim lessons! Regardless of age, everyone benefits from learning basic swimming and water survival skills. Introductory classes help parents and children establish safe habits and build swim readiness skills such as floating and breath control while faces are in the water.

For children who are older, whether in or out of swim lessons, work on these 5 Water Survival Skills:

- Jumping into water over their head and returning to the surface.
- Moving from a position on their stomach to their backs and back to stomach.
- Floating and Treading Water.
- Breathing with forward movement in the water towards safety.
- Exiting the water.

# Equine Safety for Young Riders

## FAST TIPS

- Dress for the weather - wear secure closed toed boots or shoes, long pants, and most importantly a properly adjusted secured ASTM/SEI approved riding helmet.
- If you are not sure of something, ask. Staff are more than happy to help you.
- Walk in the barn or near the horses; running may scare a horse.
- Stay off hay piles, pasture fences, or gates.
- Calmly and slowly enter horse stalls when you arrive on site.
- Get permission before feeding a horse, because their diets are carefully monitored.
- If a horse gets loose, and you are not in a lesson, call out "loose horse" to alert others and get to a safe place unless you are directed to help by staff. If in a lesson follow instructor directions.
- Have fun and treat each horse as a respected team member.

## WORKING WITH HORSES

Not only are horses beautiful, but they're also one of the largest creatures we get to interact with on a regular basis. Because horses are so large and powerful, there are important safety tips that everyone should know before approaching or riding a horse.

When working with horses you should wear a closed toed boot with a heel, like a cowboy boot or riding shoe, long pants or riding breeches, a properly adjusted riding helmet, and riding gloves.



## HORSE BODY LANGUAGE

Horses behave like horses and not like dogs or cats. Horses are usually friendly and gentle. Most horses like being patted, brushed, and talked to. The best place to make first contact with the horse is the neck or shoulder. This way you are a safe distance from the teeth and heels of the horse and the horse can see where you are.

Horses are always in the present moment. Since they are prey animals, they are always scanning the horizon to be sure they are safe. They can be hypersensitive to what might be going on in their environment. If they don't feel comfortable they often have a reaction. Horses usually give warning signs, but since they don't speak in a verbal language. Those around them should learn to read their body language for clues.

You can learn a lot about what a horse is feeling from the way they are standing, how their ears are pointed, the shape of their eyes, and the way they hold their tails. Horses are very aware of their personal space. Like humans, they have a personal comfort zone. While people often want to be close to horses, horses need their comfort zone respected. Ears that are flat back or pinned are a sign of extreme upset and a horse may try to bite or kick at whatever is alarming them.



## BEHAVIOR AROUND HORSES



Walk (don't run!) quietly toward the horse. Horses prefer quiet calm over loud noises and chaos. It is better to approach from the neck, rather than going directly toward the horse's head. If a hand is raised too quickly sometimes the horse will be startled. It is always wise to say a few words to the

horse as you approach from any direction to be sure they are aware of your presence.

It is best not to approach a horse from the rear without letting the horse know you are there. The horse can startle and kick to protect themselves. Anytime it is necessary to touch the hindquarters, put your hand on the horse's neck or shoulder first, and move it slowly back over the body, speaking at the same time. That way the horse will know your intention and not be surprised. When you need to go from one side of the horse to the other, pass in front of the horse instead of ducking under the neck, as that is a blind spot for the horse.

Otherwise, go far enough behind the horse to be well out of reach of the heels or keep a steady hand on the horse as you pass close by.

Horses are typically handled from the left side. It is good practice to lead and mount and dismount from the right now and then, to help train a well-rounded horse.

## GROOMING

Always groom the horse well before you ride. Grooming is a great way to not only keep the horse clean, but to look for any injuries, sore or tender spots or parasites. Start by picking the hooves to be sure shoes are secured properly and that no cracks or rocks are stuck in the hoof. A horse shouldn't be ridden if a shoe is missing or loose.

Here are some steps for grooming a horse:

- Start at the neck, end at the hooves
- Begin with the curry comb, being careful of the lower legs that have less flesh
- Use the dandy brush all over, then the body brush to get the last of the dust and dirt off
- Don't forget the mane and tail!



## RIDING

Riding is a very physical activity, but it is also a mental activity. There are times in riding when you will overthink things and times when you will just flow with the horse in perfect rhythm. Horses are experts at reading body language and intentions. Finding an affinity with an animal that is strong, powerful and yet highly sensitive is a privilege sought after and treasured by most riders. A horse is a sensitive partner and a generous teacher. Remember not to be too hard on yourself for any mistakes you might make and most of all remember to enjoy each ride.





# On the Road

## Child Passenger Safety

Motor vehicle crashes are the second-leading cause of death for children aged 1 to 19 , and the third-leading cause of death for children under age 1. The best way to protect children is to have them use a car seat or seat belt for every ride. Here are some general child passenger safety tips. Always read your child safety seat and vehicle owner's manuals for specific instructions.

- Use a child safety seat appropriate for your child's weight, height, age, and development.
- Register the seat with the manufacturer so you can be notified in the event of a recall.
- If you are considering a second hand seat, be sure you know its history and that it has not expired or been recalled.
- A car seat should move less than 1 inch at the belt path.
- Avoid bulky clothing, such as a winter coat. To keep a child warm, place a coat or blanket over the snug harness or seat belt.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions exactly when the seat.
- Children under age 13 are safest in the back seat.
- Set a good example—always buckle up!



## REAR-FACING CAR SEATS

In a crash, a rear-facing car seat supports a child's head, neck, and spine, while the seat absorbs most of the crash forces.

Keep children rear-facing until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by the seat's manufacturer.

For most children, this

will be well after their second birthday and often closer to age 4.

Children can bend their legs easily and will still be comfortable rear-facing. Leg injuries are extremely rare for children facing the rear.

**NOTE:** Both Vermont and New York (and many other states) require by law that children rear-face until age 2.

Here are some key points about rear-facing car seats. Read the car seat manual and your vehicle's owner's manual for complete information about installing and using the car seat.

- Never place a rear-facing car seat in front of an active airbag
- Route the harness straps at or below the child's shoulders (unless otherwise specified by the manufacturer)
- Make harness straps snug so you cannot pinch the webbing (fabric) at the child's shoulders
- Place the chest clip at armpit level
- Use the crotch buckle slot that is closest to, but not underneath, the child's body (unless the manufacturer instructs otherwise)
- Make sure you understand when inserts or pads that came with the seat are required to be used and/or removed



## FORWARD-FACING CAR SEATS



Compared with seat belts, child restraints, when not seriously misused, were associated with a 28% lower risk of death for 2- to 6-year olds.

Keep children in a harnessed seat until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by the car seat manufacturer. Most car seats have a weight limit of 65 pounds when forward facing,

accommodating most children until they are 5 or 6 years old.

**NOTE:** Vermont law requires that children remain in a harnessed car seat until age 5.

Here are some key points about forward-facing car seats. Read the car seat manual and your vehicle's owner's manual for complete information about installing and using the car seat.

- Always use a top tether with a forward-facing car seat
- Route the harness straps at or above the child's shoulders (unless otherwise specified by the manufacturer)
- Make harness straps snug so you cannot pinch the webbing (fabric) at the child's shoulders
- Place the chest clip at armpit level
- Use the crotch buckle slot that is closest to, but not underneath, the child's body (unless the manufacturer instructs otherwise)

### VEHICULAR HEATSTROKE PREVENTION TIPS

- Never leave a child alone in a vehicle
- Create reminders to check the back seat when you leave the car
- Keep vehicles locked when unattended
- Call 911 if you see a child alone in a car

## BELT POSITIONING BOOSTER SEATS

Booster seat use reduces the risk for serious injury by 45% for children aged 4 to 8, compared with using a seat belt use alone. Here are key points to remember:

- Always use a booster with a lap **and** shoulder belt—never just a lap belt.
- Children should never use a booster until they weigh at least 40 lbs. **AND** are at least age 4. It's best to wait until a child is between 5 and 6 years old to use a booster seat (and age 5 is the law in Vermont).
- A high-backed booster is a good choice for new booster riders. The back helps remind them to sit properly, provides extra support, and gives a place to lean their heads. A high-backed booster is necessary in vehicles without headrests or high seat backs.



## SEAT BELTS

Keep your child in a booster until they are at least 8 years old (Vermont and New York law) and you can answer **yes** to these “5 steps:”

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the vehicle seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat with the feet touching the floor?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

Do this test in any vehicle and seating position where your child rides.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, most children will not fit properly in most vehicle seat belts without a booster until 10 to 12 years of age.

## GETTING HELP

To make sure your child is riding safely, visit a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST). You will receive personal instructions on the proper selection, harnessing, installation and use of child safety seats and help determining if your child is ready to ride without a booster.

Websites for the Vermont Department of Health Child Passenger Safety program at [www.beseatsmart.org](http://www.beseatsmart.org) and the New York Governor's Traffic Safety Committee at <https://trafficsafety.ny.gov/child-passenger-safety> list car seat safety events and fitting (inspection) stations around each state. Or, visit this National Safety Council website [www.safety-connection.org/caregiver/](http://www.safety-connection.org/caregiver/) to locate a CPST in another state or to book a virtual seat check appointment. The best installs are tech checked!

For more information on car seat safety, visit [UVMHealth.org/CarSeats](http://UVMHealth.org/CarSeats) or the American Academy of Pediatrics [HealthyChildren.org](http://HealthyChildren.org) website (search "car seats"). In particular, check out their Car Safety Seat Product Listing. This resource covers child safety seats by stage and includes weight/height limits, certain features, and price.



# More Car Safety Tips

## TRUNK ENTRAPMENT

A car trunk may seem like a fun place for kids, but poor ventilation and risk of heat make it a dangerous space.

- Teach kids that trunks are never for playing.
- Show children where to find and how to use the emergency trunk-release handle.
- If your child is missing, get help and check vehicles and trunks (and swimming pools). If a child is found in a car, get them out as quickly as possible and dial 911 immediately.

## BACKOVER INCIDENTS

These incidents typically occur when a vehicle is reversing out of a driveway or parking space and the driver does not see a child.

Before getting in a vehicle, drivers should walk completely around their parked vehicles to check for children, or anything that could attract a child, such as a pet or toy. Then, look carefully behind you and back up slowly in case a child dashes behind your vehicle unexpectedly.



# School Buses

## A SAFE WAY TO GET TO SCHOOL

Did you know that the school bus is one of the safest vehicles on the road? Less than 1% of all traffic fatalities involve children on school transportation vehicles, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Large buses are designed to be highly visible and protect school children and older occupants by closely-spaced seats with energy-absorbing seat backs. This design is called compartmentalization.”



Although NHTSA does not require seat belts on large buses, some states, including New York, do. If your child takes a bus that has seat belts, the best practice is to use them. Small buses, while still highly visible, are more like passenger vehicles. They must be equipped with seat belts to provide protection for all occupants.

Since children are more at risk when approaching or leaving a school bus, make sure everyone knows these bus safety tips:

- Wait at least 10 feet (5 giant steps) from the curb of the bus stop.
- Never walk behind the bus. Walk at least 10 feet in front of it while making eye contact with the bus driver.
- Even when the school bus has its flashing red lights on, always look left, right, and left again before crossing any lanes of traffic.

## Backpack Safety

Backpacks that are not properly fitted or worn by a child or teen can cause back, neck, and shoulder pain. Here are tips for choosing the right backpack for carrying their books, school supplies, lunch, and whatever else they wish to bring with them.

- **Correct Size:** The bag you choose should be proportional to your child's height. The bottom of the backpack should rest in the curve of the lower back, about 1-2 inches below the shoulder and above the waist.
- **Straps:** Look for wide, padded straps that help distribute the weight better. Adjustable straps are important to ensure correct placement of the bag on their back.
- **Compartments:** Backpacks with multiple compartments can help distribute the weight of the contents.

### IS THEIR BACKPACK TOO HEAVY?

- Backpacks should weigh no more than 15% of your child's body weight. For instance, a 50 lb. child's backpack should not weigh more than 7.5 lbs. or a 100 lb. child's backpack should not weigh more than 15 lbs.
- Reduce the weight of the backpack, if you notice your child leaning forward in order to support the weight of the backpack.



# Teen Drivers

## WHEN ARE THEY READY?

Teen drivers aged 16 to 19 are at a higher risk of crashing. Part of the reason is that teens have less experience as new drivers. They are more likely to underestimate or fail to recognize dangerous situations and are less likely to wear a seatbelt.

To help your teen drive safer, always be a role model for safe driving behaviors. Make sure everyone in the vehicle is buckled up or properly restrained in a car seat or booster.

- Always drive sober. Drinking any amount of alcohol increases crash risk among teen drivers, even at Blood Alcohol Concentration levels below the legal limit for adults over legal drinking age.
- Drive distraction free. Cell phones are not the only distraction while driving. Anything that takes your eyes off the road, your mind of driving, and your hands off the wheel is a distraction.
- Drive the speed limit. Teens are more likely than other drivers to exceed posted speed limits, increasing their crash risk.



To set up your new driver up for success,

- Know and follow your state Graduated Drivers License laws.
- Supervise driving under varied conditions, including rain, snow, and nighttime driving.
- Set up clear rules and expectations for them and their passengers. Check out Parent-Teen Driving Agreements for examples.
- Consider the safety features of the car they are driving. Teens typically drive older cars which may lack critical safety features. Newer vehicles provide added protection such as crash avoidance and driver assist features, which may benefit teen drivers.

### BE PREPARED FOR AN EMERGENCY

For every vehicle, it's a good idea to assemble a roadside emergency kit. You can purchase a kit or create your own with the pieces that would be most helpful if there is a mechanical problem or weather emergency.

- Tire tools like a tire pressure gauge, jack and lug wrench for changing a tire, a tire plug kit, or portable tire inflator.
- Flashlight or headlamp.
- Reflective triangles, flares, or glow sticks to bring attention to your location if the vehicle breaks down.
- Jumper cables to restart the car battery (or help out someone else who needs a jump!)
- First aid or bleeding control kit to treat or manage basic or serious medical emergencies.
- Non-perishable food and bottled water are important to have in case of being stranded for any length of time.
- Blankets and warm clothing, especially for the winter months.
- Shovel for digging out of snow or mud, which is a real risk almost year round in Vermont!



# Off-Road Travel

## ATV, SNOWMOBILES, AND MORE

Vermont is filled with great trails and areas to go off-roading whether for recreation or for work on a farm or large property. No matter the reason, when it comes to off-roading the best way to be safe is to be prepared. Here are our quick tips for riders of any age.



- 1) Always practice proper maintenance and check the condition of the vehicle before every ride.
- 2) Enroll in a certified ATV or snowmobiling safety course. They provide key education for new riders and great refreshers for experienced ones.
- 3) Make sure all riders (kids and adults) wear proper protection. This goes beyond helmets. For ATV's, this includes long sleeves and pants, over-the-ankle boots, gloves, and chest protectors. For snowmobiles, its' well-insulated protective clothing, goggles, waterproof snow suit, gloves, and boots. And the helmets should be designed and tested specifically for snowmobiles, ATV's, and side-by-sides. A bike helmet is not the right helmet to wear on an off road vehicle.
- 4) Avoid crossing or riding on public roads. Off-road vehicles are not designed for paved surfaces and driving on them can lead to loss of control or a rollover.
- 5) Always ride with friends. It's not only more fun, but having someone with you is safer in case a crash, rollover, or other injury occurs. Cell phone signals aren't always reliable when off-roading!

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that ATV's and snowmobiles should only be ridden by kids over the age of 16.



If children under the age of 16 are driving their own vehicle, it should be appropriately sized for them. Adult size vehicles are too large, heavy, powerful, and fast for younger kids to manage. Research different sizes and types of off road vehicles to find the one that best fits your child's size, strength and developmental level.

Vermont law does not allow drivers under the age of 12 to drive ATV's across public highways. Additionally, children under 12 must wear proper protective headgear while operating or riding as a passenger on land owned by family members or with written permission of the landowner and with direct supervision of someone over the age of 18 years who does not have a suspended operator's license.

According to the AAP, children under 6 should never be allowed to operate an ATV or snowmobile. Their developmental skills are not to the point where they can do so safely. In fact, even carrying or having children under 6 as passengers is not recommended.

Children and teens should have constant adult supervision when using an ATV, snowmobile, or other off road vehicle. An adult should either be riding along with them or present to watch them as they are riding. If something goes wrong, fast response by adults is vital.

All drivers and passengers, regardless of age, must have a properly fitted helmet when operating an off road vehicle anywhere it must be legally registered to use, such as recreational VASA Trails, public land, or roads.

Finally, no one should operate a snowmobile, ATV, or side-by-side while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or medication that can physically or mentally impair driving skills and reaction times. Adults should always model safe and responsible riding behavior to their kids and the kids in their community.

# Pedestrian Safety

Walking to school has many benefits for kids. They get exercise, build confidence, and even do better in school! Most children are ready to start walking on their own after age 10. Before they turn 10, a parent or caregiver can help kids prepare. Walking to and from school can help familiarize children with their neighborhood, teach them about traffic signs, street signs and directions, and model correct behaviors when crossing streets. The following safety concepts can apply to kids of all ages!

## CROSSING THE ROAD SAFELY



Most children in kindergarten through second grade are not developmentally ready to cross streets on their own and may not fully grasp the dangers of crossing the street. They should be encouraged to cross the street only with an adult. Children typically develop the cognitive ability to cross streets on their own between ages 9 and 10 (3rd and 4th grade).

Drivers are required by law to yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk, but crashes still occur there. Children should be taught to follow the usual rules: look left -right-left and scan while crossing.

## WALK, DON'T RUN

Children may want to run across the street in order to cross quickly, but this can cause a fall and make it difficult to scan left and right. Children should walk, not run, when crossing the road, driveways or in a parking lot.

## USE SIDEWALKS WHEN AVAILABLE

Teach children that when there is a sidewalk available, they should use it. When there are no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk on the left side of the road, facing traffic to keep their eyes on vehicles.

## BEWARE OF BUS BLIND SPOTS

There are many blind spots around a bus, primarily those extending about 10 feet in front of and on each side of the bus, where the driver cannot see pedestrians. Teach children to walk at least 5 feet straight out from the bus doorway and then at least 10 feet beyond the front of the bus when crossing in front of the bus. Remind children to never cross behind a school bus because the driver cannot see them.

Cars can also have large blind spots. Larger vehicles, like trucks and SUVs, can have large blind spots that put children under the age of 6 at higher risk for being run over when the vehicle is pulling out or backing up. Drivers should always triple check around their vehicle for children before moving a vehicle. Children should be kept close to taller adults in parking lots or while crossing driveways to increase visibility.

For more basic safety tips on walking, and biking to school, visit: [saferoutes.vermont.gov](https://saferoutes.vermont.gov).



## Bike Safety

Biking is a fun way to get around town. But before a child hops on a bike, there are some safety precautions you should take.



First, do an ABC check to make sure the bike is working well.

**A** stands for air. Are tires properly inflated? Squeeze them to make sure they are firm.

**B** is for brakes. The brakes shouldn't be too loose or too tight.

**C** stands for chain. Check to see if the chain is clean and lubricated.

Don't forget to check that the helmet fits properly. There should only be 1-2 fingers of space from the top of the eyebrow to the helmet. At least one finger (no more than 2 fingers) should fit between the strap and the chin. The side straps should form a "v" right below the ear. The helmet should sit flatly on the head, not at an angle. The helmet should fit snugly. Check also that the helmet is in good condition and there aren't any cracks. Never let a child use a helmet that was in a crash. Some people advocate replacing helmets after five years of use.

Visibility is key to keeping safe on the road. Riders should wear light and reflective clothing. A red blinking light in the back and a light on the front particularly at night is important.

Once they are ready to go, review all the rules of the road. Yield to pedestrians in crosswalk. Ride in the same direction as traffic.



Remember to stop at stop signs and obey traffic signals. Even if you have the right of way, make sure that the drivers have stopped. Extend your arm in the direction when you are making a turn so that drivers are aware of which way you are going. If you are making a right turn, look in all directions before you go. If you are making a left turn, look behind and if there are no cars, extend your left arm and move to the center of the lane. Look both directions again, before making your turn.



Driving on sidewalks may feel safer, but bicyclists are harder to see than pedestrians. You must yield to pedestrians and bike very slowly,

particularly being aware of drivers pulling out of driveways.



Biking is a great form of transportation and exercise and reminding your child to take these precautions will ensure a safe ride.

For more information, check out [A Parent's Guide to Safe](#)

[Bicycling Essentials: How to help your child become a confident and competent rider](#) by Local Motion.

## HOW TO FIT A BIKE HELMET: STEP-BY-STEP

- 1) There should only be 1-2 fingers of space from the top of your eyebrow to your helmet.
- 2) At least one finger (no more than 2 fingers) should fit between the strap and your chin.
- 3) The side straps should form a “V” right below your ear.
- 4) The helmet should fit snugly without being uncomfortable and fit flat on the head, not at an angle.
- 5) Adjust the fit ring at the back of the helmet (if your helmet has one) so that it’s snug against the back of your head.
- 6) Shake your head like a rockstar! If your helmet wobbles, go back through the steps.

To help you remember, think “2V2” - no more than **2** fingers between eyebrow and helmet, straps form a **V** just below ear, and no more than **2** fingers fit in chin strap!



# Advocate for Better Design

## TO BE SAFE, WE ALSO NEED SAFE INFRASTRUCTURE

There are many benefits for children walking, rolling, and biking to school. When children are not isolated in their cars they are able to connect with their neighborhood and be more independent. They can socialize with their friends. Moving their body before class helps them focus better on their work, Active kids are healthier both mentally and physically.

Unfortunately we have become a much more car centered culture which makes walking, rolling, and biking less safe. According to Safe Routes to School, “in 1969, 48% of children aged 5 to 14 usually walked or bicycled to school. By 2009, that number had dropped to just 13%.” With more cars on the road parents may feel less comfortable allowing their children to go to school independently.



One way to keep kids safe and active is advocating for better infrastructure. Traffic calming measures like bump outs allow drivers to slow down and better see pedestrians. Similarly, crosswalks with signals can help a child safely cross a busy street. Segregated bike lanes help bicyclists more easily navigate shared streets.

Advocating for safety infrastructure allows not only children to become more independent, it benefits us all. A community that is walkable, rollable, and bikeable is more environmentally friendly, healthier, and more deeply connected.

# Travel Tips

Whether it's a family vacation or visiting friends and relatives, here are tips for everyone's safety and comfort.

## AIRPLANES

- Prepare your child for airport security by discussing the screening process prior to arriving at the airport.
- Remind older children that it's against the law to make jokes about bombs or other similar threats. Even jokes can delay your family and result in fines and arrest.
- Children under 40 lb. should be properly restrained in a car seat on the airplane. Check your car seat for a label stating it is FAA-approved.
- An aircraft seat belt begins to fit children at approximately 40 lb. Even if they no longer need the car seat on the flight, if your child needs a car seat at the destination it's best to have them sit in it on the airplane. Note, boosters cannot be used on airplanes but can be easily stowed.



## CARS

- Plan a driving break about every two hours to stretch, snack, and use the bathroom.
- Never leave children alone in a vehicle. Temperatures inside a car can rapidly rise, leading to heatstroke and death.
- Pack so the heaviest bags are at the bottom of your trunk with lighter bags and boxes on top. Secure everything to prevent projectiles in case of a crash.



## HOTEL SAFETY TIPS

- Keep up Safe Sleep habits, especially for infants and toddlers.
- Never leave your child alone in your hotel room.
- Pack a carbon monoxide detector, as many hotels are not required to have them.
- Stay within arm's reach of children while swimming.
- Find the emergency exits and the routes to reach them.

## GENERAL TIPS

- Consider packing hand-washing gel or disinfectant wipes for when washing your hands isn't possible.
- Pack lots of water and snacks.
- Create a separation plan. This can be a designated meeting spot or best ways to communicate with each other.



# Train Safety

Railroad tracks run all across the state. While trains are considered one of the safest modes of transportation available, there are still ways to help keep you and your family even safer on and around them.



## AS A PEDESTRIAN

- Only cross train tracks at designated crossings marked by a sign, lights, and or a gate.
- Never try to race the gate or train. Trains can be closer and faster than expected. If the lights are flashing or the gate is going down, wait for the train to pass, and only cross after the lights stop flashing at the crossing.
- Avoid walking along train tracks. Even walking next to them is dangerous as trains are much wider than the tracks and moving at high speeds. It can take over a mile for a train to come to a complete stop when they brake.
- When near train tracks or crossing tracks, keep your eyes up and ears open so you can see the flashing lights or hear the horn of the train as it approaches. Many people are surprised to learn that modern trains are quiet - they don't go "clickety-clack" anymore!
- Never place an object on the tracks. Objects, like rocks or coins, can be 'shot' back at bystanders by the train wheels at the speed of a bullet and may cause serious injuries.

## AS A DRIVER

- Never stop your vehicle on the tracks.
- When driving across train tracks, wait until you can clear the entire railroad crossing and not only the tracks.

- When you see flashing lights or lowered gates, try to stop at least 15 feet away from the railroad crossing.
- If your vehicle stalls on the tracks, quickly get everyone out even if you don't see a train coming. Run away from the tracks to protect yourself from debris if the vehicle is hit. Then contact the number on emergency notification system signs or call 911.

### AS A PASSENGER

- Stand back from the edge of the platform and wait for trains to come to a full stop before approaching.
- Hold tightly to the hands of smaller children when at stations or road crossings.
- Try to remain seated while the train is in motion. If you need to move while the train is moving, use the handles and handrails to move around.
- Pay attention to announcements made by the train crew and follow their instructions.



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Kana Zink, Violence Prevention Specialist, Division of Family and Child Health, Vermont Department of Health



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