

Home Safety

Because of COVID-19, families are home together. The following are strategies and tips that provide reminders and may even stimulate home projects! In a time when families are home together continuously, there will be a greater need for structure and safety as a new environment evolves for family life and learning in the household.

Here are some tips and strategies:

In the kitchen,

- Keep a distance between flammable objects (papers, curtains, plastics, etc.) and fire sources (oven, stove top, portable heater, etc.)
- Use harmful products (cleaning solutions, lighters) with caution (follow instructions!) and keep them out of reach of children and pets.
- Never leave sharp objects (knives) or other such tools and utensils misplaced or unattended.
- Ensure electrical cords aren't draped across other appliances or the counter or stovetop.
- Leave space around appliances for proper ventilation.

In the bathroom,

- Keep electrical appliances wrapped and away from water.
- Use non-slip strips or floor mats
- Always keep the room clean and as dry as possible.

In the garage,

- This is probably where you store most of your tools and equipment. Take precautions with flammable liquids, chemicals, and anything producing fumes.
- Keep poisonous substances (paint thinner, antifreeze, rat poison, etc.) locked up and out of reach of children and pets.
- Keep your space clean and organized, especially as many of your tools are sharp, heavy, or otherwise dangerous.

In the yard,

- Be aware of your boundaries and borders. (this is more for keeping in children and pets, but can also serve to remind strangers to keep out).
- If you've got a pool, keep it locked down or fenced in when not in use.
- Be careful when working in bad weather. Use sand, salt, and good-traction footwear on ice and snow.

On the stairs,

- Keep steps clean and dry.
- Always install stable and sturdy railing on both sides of the stairs.
 - Ensure that the distance between the rails is narrow enough to prevent a child or infant from falling through.
 - Less than four inches is a standard rule of thumb.
- Keep stairs well lit.

Guard against fire with these home safety tips:

- Install smoke detectors, check them regularly, and replace the batteries at least once a year.
- Avoid overloading outlets and extension cords.
- Keep fire extinguishers handy and know how to use them.
- Establish a safety exit, ensure all family members know and understand it, practice with drills, and ensure it's never blocked.
- Never block or pile things on heaters or near heat-exuding appliances; give these a wide berth, plenty of breathing room, and make sure they don't get overheated.
- Ensure that all materials are fire-resistant if you're renovating or just fixing up something around the house.
- Never leave any type of fire or hot appliance unattended.
- Remove dry vegetation around your home, especially during the dry seasons.
- Cover the fireplace with a stable and large metal fire frame.

Have easy access to important phone numbers: the police, the fire department, poison control, and trusted family, friends, and neighbors, in case of an emergency. You can create a document and save this on your mobile devices, and save a hard copy in your pantry or cabinet.

Clearly mark your street number on the mailbox, fence, gate, or wall so you can easily be located in case of an emergency.

Be watchful and report any suspicious activity around your house or in the neighborhood to the local authorities immediately.

Don't leave digital footprints for criminals. Social networks provide an easy, fun, and dangerous way to announce your identity and residence. Don't forget that your friends aren't the only ones with access to your information that you post.

- Never announce that you're leaving your home, especially for prolonged absences.
- Never post your address or phone number.
- Be careful of the information you provide on your answering machine, voicemail, or email signatures.

Protecting Children:

Never leave children alone or unattended near water or fire.

- If a child is missing, ALWAYS check bodies of water (pool or bathtub) first—you can prevent a drowning by mere seconds.

Unload and lock away firearms, and any other weapons.

Keep medications and chemicals safely out of reach.

Keep choking hazards (small items and small food) safely out of reach.

Keep heavy or breakable objects safely out of reach.

Secure household items; prevent tipping by securing bookcases, shelves, and other objects or appliances that could disastrously fall.

Immediately replace any damaged, frayed, or faulty materials or appliances that could pose a hazard to an unsuspecting child.

Cover outlets, ground appliances, and coil extension cords when not in use; although these are rules to be followed anyway, they are especially important with children underfoot.

Reduce the risk of suffocation by removing access to trunks, old refrigerators, car trunks, and any other such area where children could get locked in.

- Keep beds and cribs as bare as possible—infants in particular are susceptible to suffocation.

Block or lock the windows, stairways, and doors to prevent accidental falls or unintended wanderings by small children. If you have to open a window near small children, open the upper half of a window versus the lower window closest to the ground.

Plants are beautiful, but they can be toxic if consumed. Know what plants you have, and opt for the safest ones.

PROTECTING ELDERLY:

Guard against falls:

- Install rails along the staircase, in the bathroom.
- Secure windows, block stairways in some specific cases, and lock doors that may benefit heightened safety measures.
- Replace unstable or slippery rugs and runners.
- Ensure the floor is always clean, clear, and dry.

Tips:

- Keep rooms well lit; elders often have trouble with vision (or other senses, in which case it's even more important for them to see).
- Use night lights or motion-sensor lights for easy navigation.
- Arrange furniture for easy navigation.
- Rearrange furniture and items to make often-used objects more accessible.
- Easy access to phone numbers in case of an emergency or in order to contact family/a trusted neighbor.

WHEN LEAVING THE HOME:

Lock up. Ensure that all your locks are functioning properly and that all doors and windows are locked.

Create the illusion that someone is home:

- Turn on (and leave on) a TV or stereo
- Leave some interior lights on; use a timer if you're gone for more than a day.
- Leave on exterior lighting
- Use exterior lights that turn on via motion detectors

Never leave notes on the door when you go out (for a neighbor, friend, family member)—this is notifying everyone that you've left the building and your residence is open.

Lower your ring tone on your home phone. If you'll be gone for a while, adjust your telephone so that the volume is low, and the pattern of ringing doesn't signal your absence.

Never leave extra keys in expected places. Under the doormat and in the flowerpot are too common for someone to spot. Find an inconspicuous place, or entrust a reliable neighbor.