

Childproofing Your House For A New Walker

*The University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development*

Jessica began crawling at nine months. Finally, her parents thought, she was on the verge of walking. The long-awaited moment was at hand.

Suddenly, Jessica was crawling furiously throughout the house, getting into cabinets, pulling herself up on bookshelves – exploring just about everything every minute of every day.

For all of their anticipation, Jessica's parents had not child-proofed their home with a active child in mind, even one who is not yet walking.

Children, on average, take their first steps around 12 to 15 months of age. But before then, they'll creep, crawl, and cruise around the house as they progress toward walking.

So, start early to childproof your house. Crawl around the house yourself to see the hazards your child will see.

Start with the stairs, which rank as one of the most dangerous areas of a house. Keep in mind that a mobile child can find trouble very quickly. So, for your child's safety and your peace of mind, block the top and bottom of the stairs with a gate. Also use gates to block a child from certain rooms and dangerous areas of the house.

But gates themselves can pose a danger. Be careful when selecting one. Generally, a gate should be at least 32 inches high and the slats should be close enough so that your child's head cannot fit between them.

Drapery cords with a loop at the end also pose a risk of strangulation. Cut the cord at the bottom of the loop to eliminate this hazard.

Secure bookshelves and entertainment centers to the wall so they won't fall over when your child pulls on them. Pad sharp edges on tables that can cut a child who falls against them. Put breakables, such as dinner plates, glasses, and decorative items out of reach.

Electrical shock and burns are also a concern when a curious child is on the move. Cover unused electrical outlets with outlet plate covers. Hide electrical cords or tape them to the floor, but not under a rug.

Secure soaps, bleach, and other poisons and hazardous materials. Place them out of reach or use special cabinet locks. Also, have the poison control center, police, fire, and ambulance phone numbers near your phone.

You won't – and shouldn't – curb the curiosity of a newly-mobile child, but you can – and should – make it safer for him or her to explore.

This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.