

# Parent Tips to Prevent Child Falls

Home can be a safe place for children to learn and grow. However, most injuries to young children do occur in their homes. Children are vulnerable in this environment because heights, space and structures are built for adult use and comfort, often creating hazards for children. Children also have a natural curiosity about their environment and love to explore.

For children up to age 14, the leading causes of fall-related injuries are:

- falls from furniture;
- falls from playground equipment;
- falls on stairs; and,
- slips and trips (falls on the same level).<sup>1</sup>

Most fall-related injuries to children under 5 happen in the home. Follow these tips to keep kids safe from falls in the home and at play.

## In the Home

- ◆ **Get on your child's level!** Take time to get down on the ground and look around to see the world through your child's eyes to identify hazards around your home.
- ◆ **Use window stops and keep balcony doors locked.** A window screen can easily tear or get pushed through if your child is pressing on it. Keep windows locked when possible and use window stops, which prevent windows from being opened wide enough for a child to fall through.
- ◆ **Use stair gates in your home.** Always use hardware mount gates at the top of stairs. Pressure mount gates can be used at the bottom of stairs.
- ◆ **Place all furniture away from windows and balcony door handles.** Remember, children can climb even before they are able to walk. Climbing on furniture gives children access to windows and balcony door handles where they can fall from significant heights.
- ◆ **Buckle your child in their high chair or stroller every time.** This will prevent your child from falling out as they move, wiggle and reach.
- ◆ **Always keep one hand on your child when they are on a high surface,** such as a changing table or other furniture, to prevent them from falling to the ground.
- ◆ **Always set car seats and other carriers down on the floor,** never on top of furniture.
- ◆ **Never purchase or use a baby walker with wheels.** Baby walkers with wheels are banned for sale in Canada because they put children at serious risk of falling down stairs and getting to areas of the home they wouldn't normally be able to reach.

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<sup>1</sup>Parachute. (2015). *The Cost of Injury in Canada – Summary Report: Falls & Transport Injury Trends in Children 2004 and 2010*. [http://www.parachutecanada.org/downloads/research/Cost\\_of\\_Injury-2015-Child\\_Injury\\_Compendum.pdf](http://www.parachutecanada.org/downloads/research/Cost_of_Injury-2015-Child_Injury_Compendum.pdf)

- ◆ **Keep stairs and high-traffic areas in your home free from clutter and tripping hazards such as toys and books.** In areas such as the bathroom and kitchen, wipe up any water spills right away to prevent slipping.

## At Play

- ◆ **Prevent falls from heights on playground equipment.** Make sure playground equipment has guardrails or barriers that prevent falls. Try to keep higher equipment out of the reach of children five years old and younger. For example, remove the lowest rung of ladders to keep toddlers from climbing.
- ◆ **Properly anchor your purchased or homemade playground equipment.** Home playground equipment is usually lighter than public playground equipment. This means it needs to be anchored to prevent it from tipping over or collapsing. Always check the manufacturer's guide for anchoring instructions. Cover or hide anchors so they don't become tripping hazards.
- ◆ **Put a deep, soft surface around play equipment to protect against injuries from falls.** A deep, soft surface will cushion falls and prevent many injuries. Provide a loose-fill surface, such as sand or wood chips, of 15 to 30 centimetres (six to 12 inches) deep under swings, climbers, and slides. Higher equipment needs deeper surfacing.
- ◆ **Inspect your home playground regularly.** Make repairs or remove broken equipment. Remove or repair any areas that can catch children's clothing. Check that bolts are tight and equipment is well anchored. Check the depth of surfacing – add more surfacing where necessary and rake surfacing to keep it loose and free from debris.
- ◆ **Active supervision, while still giving your child the chance to explore and develop, is key.** For children younger than five years, stay close to children as they play. And keep an eye on older children, too; they like to take chances but do not necessarily understand risks.