

## Keep Your Children Safe at Home

The outbreak of COVID-19 has required a response unlike anything we have dealt with previously. The stress of the unknown, of changing financial situations, of lost jobs and businesses, of children being kept at home for months can be overwhelming. The public health measures for controlling the spread of COVID-19 mean that families will be in their homes for extended periods of time.

While some family togetherness can be fun and enjoyable, the stressors of these times can overcome parents and caregivers; and family relations can become strained. The Vermont Department of Health cares about both your family's physical health and mental wellbeing and offers these tips for keeping your children safe in your home and for managing the inevitable stress that can result from long periods of being together in your home.

## General Safety

- Do a basic safety check of your house. Consider your children's ages and abilities when "child proofing" your living space.
- If there are infants and toddlers in your home, remove small objects and pieces of toys to prevent swallowing or choking.
- Check the batteries in the smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and make sure there is a detector on every floor of your home.
- Secure your TV, bookshelves, dressers and other top-heavy furniture to prevent tip overs.
- Avoid scald burns by keeping hot liquids away from the edge of counters, cooking on the back burners of the stove, and placing the cord for hot pots or slow cookers to the back of the counter.
- If you have a baby, continue to use [safe sleep](#) practices by putting the baby to sleep by themselves, on their back, in a safety-approved crib, and with no other toys or blankets in the crib. The baby needs to sleep this way every time for napping and at night.

## Safe Storage

- Medications, prescriptions and over the counter drugs should be secured out of sight and out of reach of children and youth.
- If you have a gun in your home, make sure the gun is locked and unloaded, with the ammunition locked separately.
- If alcohol, tobacco products, or other potentially harmful substances are kept in the home, secure them in a place that is not accessible to children and teens.

## Outdoor Time

- Before your child goes biking, scootering or skate boarding, check their helmet for proper fit and make sure they wear it on every ride.
- Review basic street safety rules such as crossing at crosswalks, obeying traffic signals, and watching out for cars.
- Children of all ages should be well supervised when playing near open bodies of water such as lakes and streams. Spring thaw can cause water levels and currents to increase dangerously.
- Always have an appointed adult as the “Water Watcher” to supervise children near swimming pools or open bodies of water.

## Screen Time

- It’s okay to give your kids more screen time than you normally do. If a parent or caregiver needs a break, they shouldn’t feel guilty about putting children in front of the TV, tablet, computer or mobile phone and letting them watch a show or movie.
- Double check parental control settings on all devices used by children and monitor their screen time and internet usage.
- Talk to your child about cyber-bullying and be aware of their social media usage.

## Talk with Your Kids

- Be sure to talk with children and teens about how they are feeling and listen to what they are saying. While your child or teen may seem like they are coping with the current situation it is important to check-in often.
- Even if you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, set aside time for family-bonding, such as a family dinner, playing a game or watching a movie together.

## Resources

- The American Academy of Pediatrics
  - [General Injury](#)
  - [Firearm Safety](#)
- [Safe Kids](#)
- [University of Vermont Medical Center](#)
- [Vermont Department of Health](#) for COVID-19 information. Click on the heading: “Communities, Families and Individuals.”