

A Safe Home Environment

This short review will provide you with some ideas on how you can create a safe home environment for a child with autism.

Introduction

Safety in the home is a concern for all parents, and especially for parents of children with autism, as they often do not understand the link between their actions and the consequences of these actions. Many of the common behaviors that children with autism display can also be unsafe. For example, you might find your child chewing on something that is inedible and is a choking hazard. By taking steps to secure your home, you will reduce the chances of an accident, and also create a positive environment for your child, where he or she can feel comfortable. Note that each home and each child is different, so you may need to consider issues that we do not address as you set up your home.

Basic Safety

To take care of basic safety issues, you should consider putting hazardous chemicals, medications, sharp objects and anything else that your child may accidentally ingest or hurt themselves with under lock and key. Many baby stores sell child safety devices that may be helpful. If your child is older, you may actually need to use a lock to secure an area. There are different types of locks that do not use keys, and you can consider these to avoid having to carry around a large number of keys.

It is important to use covers for electrical outlets and gas knobs to prevent electric shocks or burns. You may want to adjust the temperature of your water heater, so that the hottest water from a faucet is not hot enough to burn your child. Use museum putty or gel to secure items that break easily. Use unbreakable or plastic dishes, cups and bowls for meal times to prevent your child from throwing and breaking these items.

If you are concerned about your child eating raw foods that need cooking, or eating excessive amounts of food, you can use refrigerator locks, or put items that need cooking in one area of the kitchen or pantry and secure that area. Keep pet food out of reach of your child. Keep anything with batteries or magnets out of reach. This includes remote controls or even toys with small batteries or magnets. Bolt bookcases and heavy objects such as a television or dresser to the wall to avoid accidents. Avoid using corded blinds to prevent suffocation. Use very short cords for appliances and telephones so avoid strangulation. Cordless phones might be helpful.

Many children with autism love to play with water. For younger children you can discourage flushing items down the toilet by purchasing a toilet lock that requires an adult to lift the toilet lid for use. You can also remove plugs from the bathtub after use, so that a child cannot fill the bathtub without your knowledge.

Preventing a Child from Running Away

Having a child run away or get lost is a huge concern for many parents of children with autism. It may be helpful to have an alarm installed on exits so that you are aware of anyone leaving the house. Additional items to consider:

- Special locks that prevent a child from leaving the home unattended (be sure that you can access all rooms in an emergency).
- Digital keypads that need a code work for exterior entrances.
- Window guards to keep a child from falling or climbing out of an open window.
- Medical ID with the child's information on it if they will wear a bracelet or necklace.
- Child GPS wrist band, which tracks a child's movements and informs you if a child leaves a designated "safe" area.

Organization

Organizing your home and removing clutter can help your child feel more comfortable at home, and avoid unnecessary accidents and power struggles. Sorting items into boxes/bins with labels and pictures on them will offer your child visual support when they need an item. Being able to predict where to find something will also discourage a child from rummaging through drawers and cupboards. You can use difficult to reach areas to store items that are hazardous. Once you have sorted and organized items in your home, you can do a walk through with your child to show them where to find items that they use frequently.

Talking to Your Child about Safety

One of the more underrated safety measures is talking to your child about safety. For verbal children, you can sit down and talk about various situations and what you expect your child to do or not do in those situations. You can use visual supports, social stories and modeling to show them what to do. For example, if you do not want your child to use the hot water while washing their hands mark the cold water faucet with a sticker and explain why it is important for them to use that faucet. Model and practice that behavior with your child.

You can supplement your discussions with visual cues that can remind your child what to do. If certain drawers are off limits, you can use red tape or a stop sign sticker on that drawer to remind your child that it is off limits. You can create a set of house rules and explain these to your child. Then you can review these periodically to check for understanding.

Conclusion

We hope you have found these tips useful. Making small changes can benefit everyone in the family and provide you with peace of mind when you are away from home. You can discuss other ideas for home safety with your child's therapists or teachers.