

Children's Occupational Therapy

Patient information leaflet – Equipment & Adaptations - Safety Advice

Home Safety Introduction

It's important to ensure that your home is safe for all children and young people. Not only will this benefit the whole family but will also help you to identify what else you may need to do for a child with additional needs.

Tips and Ideas

- Plan the least restrictive measure necessary to enable children to continue to develop routines necessary for daily living, whilst managing the risks for them.
- Ensure home repairs are carried out promptly to reduce the risks of accidents and further damage for example loose cupboard doors or internal doors.
- Think about introducing Visuals like pictures or symbols alongside simple clear language this can help children understand what is expected of them. Speak to your child's school or nursery for support. In some cases, a referral to Speech and Language Therapy may help you set this up at the correct level for your child.



- Social stories or story-based interventions can be a hugely useful tool to support those on the autistic spectrum or aid in communication around a specific event or subject. Visit the [National Autistic Society website](#).
- Use directive language focused on what you want to happen. "Stop" rather than "NO". "Wait" rather than "stand still." Try to distract and re-direct your child to engage in a positive activity. (Like singing a song or playing a game etc.)
- It is important to have a consistent approach and direct your child back into their room at night. A child will quickly take advantage of any benefits they may get if they wake up, e.g. staying up with them and playing. Consistency is key in establishing house rules. Everyone needs to follow them and be a good role model. School may be able to support you with ideas and visual supports.
- Reward the positive behaviours. This could be praising them or join them in their favourite activity. You may wish to use visual rewards like stickers.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate your child's response. This may mean that a restrictive measure only needs to be in place some of the time. For example, you may lock the kitchen door when you are in the bathroom and cannot fully supervise your child.

Useful Resources

If this is your first child or if there is a gap after your last one, it may be worth working through a general home safety checklist.

For more ideas you can discuss home safety issues with your health visitor if your child is under 5.



- ROSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) – General advice for Home Safety [RoSPA- RoSPA | The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents | An Accident-Free World](#)
- CAPT (Child Accident Prevention Trust) – provides child safety advice to parents and [carers Child Accident Prevention Trust A safer world for all our children](#)
- The Challenging Behaviour Foundation - this is a charity for people with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges [Homepage for The Challenging Behaviour Foundation](#)
- National Autistic Society [National Autistic Society](#)

Children and young people with additional needs can be more at risk if there is a fire in the home. Most fires in the home can be prevented by taking some basic and common sense precautions. Many people are not aware that the **Fire & Rescue Service** will come and visit your home completely free of charge at a time that suits you to carry out a free home safety check. Parents/Carers can organise a home fire safety visit: [Home Fire Safety Check | Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service](#)

A family with a child or young person with additional needs may have to carry on with these general safety measures throughout childhood so it is important to keep reminding yourself. Often children with additional needs can require more supervision than other children and can be more at risk of accident. Safety equipment can help to create a safer environment for your child. It doesn't replace the need for supervision especially for your child with additional needs.

Your child may still require a high level of parental/carers supervision within the home and garden despite suitable safety measures being in place.

Parents have to manage risk all the time and they are usually the best people to decide what is right for them and their families. With this comes the responsibility of knowing that sometimes accidents will happen. It is important for everyone not just



families with a child with additional needs, to keep checking their home for risks as their children grow and change.

All you can do is your best in the circumstances – making reasonable adjustments to keep your child as safe as possible. There are some environmental risks which can be overcome, some that can be managed and some that present an ongoing challenge. Here is an example of how two families managed:

FAMILY STORY 1

Maria makes her children's lunches in the morning before they go to school. Her youngest son, Thomas is fascinated by knives. He has grabbed a knife from the kitchen worktop.

- **Home safety:** Knives locked in a kitchen drawer using a child proof lock but still a problem when making lunches.
- **Routines:** Maria prepares the packed lunches the previous evening.
- **Around the home:** As Thomas grows older stronger locks may be needed for the knife drawers.
- **Training:** Maria is currently working on toilet training with Thomas. When this is finished she will target safety awareness around knives and seek professional advice.
- **Managing risk:** Maria tried the above strategies for a couple of weeks and was satisfied that there was now a low risk. May review if Thomas works out how to open the child proof lock.
- **Outside advice:** Not needed at moment but is aware where advice can be sought.

FAMILY STORY 2

Emily is vulnerable if she goes out of the house, she lives alone with her mother, father and has two older siblings. Emily has left the house several times when her sister has left the front door unlocked when going to play out with friends.



- **Home Safety:** Front door keys are kept in a safe secure place but still a problem when older sibling uses independently.
- **Routines:** Family decide that they will use the back door as their main door and keep the front door permanently locked with the keys kept in a safe secure place. There is a gated rear garden which is more secure than the front garden. The back door keys will also remain in a secure place.
- **Around the home:** A visual prompt is placed beside the door to remind family members to lock it.
- **Training:** Family agreed to target this problem and use a system of rewards for Emily when she stays in the house.
- **Managing risk:** The new routine worked well for several weeks so family are continuing to follow it.
- **Outside advice:** Not needed at the moment.

ARRANGING YOUR HOME

If you have taken all the usual safety measures and if you have adjusted your family's routines then you should now be able to notice if there anything in your home that makes your child more stressed and so more unsafe.

Low Arousal Environment

Many children behave differently in an environment that is 'low arousal'. This means that there isn't too much sensory stimulation.

- Plan your child's routine and make sure that where they go next is clear of clutter.
- Try to keep the rooms that your child uses most tidy and uncluttered. Large plastic stacking boxes are handy for putting toys away quickly. Many children are calmer if they are only focusing on one activity at a time.



- Consider the use of visual supports to help your child understand routines and to help your child remember what they are expected to do in different places.
- Consider décor, gentle pastel colours can be calming.
- Consider lighting, fluorescent lighting can be very harsh.
- Have only one noise at a time (e.g. turn TV off/volume down when people are talking) and have some quiet times.
- Choose fabrics that your child likes the feel of.
- Try to arrange some 'chill out spaces' where your child can take themselves for time out. This could be their bedroom, a small tent or a corner of a room. Comfy furnishings such as a bean bag, large cushions and blankets can make this a cosy space.

LIMITING ACCESS

Because children and young people with additional needs may have little awareness of danger, they may abscond from home or access rooms where they could be in danger e.g. the kitchen and bathroom.

You may need to limit where your child can go for safety reasons or to protect others and property. You may need to keep your child from accessing exits.

Only do this if you have a good reason and there is a clear risk. Check on your child regularly and do not leave your child alone in a room for longer than necessary.



Examples of possible solutions:

- Safety gates prevent children from getting into certain rooms and moving from one floor of the house to another.

Different types of safety gates with a variety of fixing methods are available from standard retailers. Standard safety gates tend not to be suitable for children aged over approximately 2 years. As your child grows you may need to fit higher and stronger gates. Other parents have found that safety gates designed for pets are more robust and suitable for older children.

If you are using a gate to stop a larger child who can climb the stairs it may be safer to fit the gate at the bottom of the stairs.

If needing to use one at the top of the stairs it may be safer to use a wall fixing model rather than pressure fixed design. If in doubt external advice should be sought.

- Keep the front and back doors of your property locked if necessary and ensure keys are not accessible to the child if they can use them to open a door.
- Keys can be kept safe on a lanyard round your neck, in an internal key safe or cash tin or even on a high ledge if your child can't access this. Ensure everyone in the family is aware of the location of your keys in the event of an emergency.
- Even a simple door chain can sometimes be enough of a deterrent.



- Many parents use a 'cylinder lock' which uses a star shaped key to operate the bolt. If you lose the key, you do not have to replace the lock and everyone else in the house can carry a key or one can be kept in a safe place.
- Products can be purchased from [Fledglings](#) and [Amazon](#) that can be attached to the door and secure it into position ('door ajar clip' and 'door monkey door lock and pinch guard'). These may meet your needs and be simpler and safer than locking doors.
- Magnetic window alarms that can alert you to the fact that your child is wandering are also available from [Fledglings](#) and [Amazon](#)
- You may need landlords' permission and/or a further risk assessment.
- May benefit from a CEAS assessment.
- Look at family routines, could you all use a back door which leads to a garden and another side entrance.
- Place something on the outside doors to remind others to keep it locked (it doesn't have to be a big sign – a decorative key is a visual reminder).
- Some parents have changed the door handle to a type that the child or young person cannot use such as a doorknob that needs to be turned to open the door.



- A key guard prevents children from unlocking doors/locking themselves inside a room. The key guard can be used with most types of cylinder and household keys and is designed to not draw attention. Available from [Safetots](#) and [Amazon](#)
- Biometric locks that read fingerprints to access a room are now more readily available. They are available from locksmiths or security firms and [Amazon](#)

Water Safety

Children with additional needs may enjoy water but may use water inappropriately in the home causing flooding and damage to property.

General Considerations:

- Ensure your child has adequate access to drinking water throughout the day and make sure you don't stop your child from getting to the toilet.
- You may need to consider other family members and their access to, and use of the bathroom.

Examples of Possible Solutions:

- Inflatable tap covers.
- 'Sure stop' water switch – a control for your water supply.
- Magi plug for the sink or bath – the pressure of the water above opens the plug when the sink or bath is full. Available from [Fledglings](#) and other suppliers.



- Sensor operated taps.
- Anti-vandalism taps.
- Check that your water supply isn't too hot. Water in boilers and tanks needs to be hot to guard against diseases particularly in the kitchen however you may be able to turn the thermostat down. Check with a plumber or check your instructions.
- Thermostatic locks on taps to prevent water reaching scalding temperatures.
- A thermostatic mixing valve can control the temperature coming out of the taps.
- Toilet cisterns can be boxed in behind a wall.
- Child proof lock for the toilet seat.
- Locks on the outside of the bathroom doors such as slide bolt or a star lock.
- Where towel and shower curtain rails are pulled off the wall, magnetic rails are available commercially. The rail pulls apart from the brackets under pressure and can easily be reattached.
- Remove plugs and only use when needed and under close supervision. This will not stop the water being wasted but will prevent flooding.



- Push taps (like they have in service stations). Children usually become bored with these.

Kitchen Safety

Children and young people with additional needs may have a reduced awareness of danger and may need ongoing supervision and protection from harmful substances and hazardous items. You may need to alter cupboard and door locks and handles of doors and cupboards in the kitchen for your child's safety.

General Considerations:

- Lock away dangerous items in the kitchen, for example knives, medicines and dangerous liquids.
- Store dangerous items out of reach of children.
- Electric cookers or induction hobs are safer than gas cookers.
- Consider standard child proof safety cupboard/drawer locks – available from [Amazon](#)

Examples of Possible Solutions:

- A stair gate or stable door at the kitchen door may be a good option so that you can keep an eye on your child whilst working in the kitchen.
- Products can be purchased from [Fledglings](#) and [Amazon](#) that can be attached to the door and secure it into position ('door ajar clip' and 'door monkey door lock and



pinch guard'). These may meet your needs and be simpler and safer than locking doors.

- Magnetic locks are child proof locks for cupboards and drawers. They are secure and concealed and impossible for the child to open without a magnetic key. They can be useful if your child is likely to fiddle with a standard child proof lock. These are available from [Fledglings](#) and [Amazon](#) and [Safetots](#)
- Appliance locks prevent children from opening appliances such as the fridge, microwave and oven.
- Cooker top guards prevent access to the cooker hob and are often useful for smaller children.
- Oven guards keep your child from touching hot ovens.
- Lockable covers are available for sockets and switches from [Fledglings](#) and [Safetots](#)

Electrical Safety

Children with additional needs may have a reduced sense of awareness of danger. If electrical appliances or sockets are tampered with there is a risk to your child's health and safety.

General Considerations:

- Any electrical work should only be undertaken by a qualified competent electrician.
- [NICEIC](#) maintains a register of qualified competent electricians.



Examples of Possible Solutions:

Lighting

- Stainless steel light switches with lockable fronts are available from most electrical suppliers.

Stainless steel is more robust than plastic. Covers are also available for a plug socket.

- Dome type ceiling light covers instead of pendant lights are safer.
- Light switches can be located outside of the room, if necessary.

Electric Sockets

- Child proof plug in socket covers are readily available at [Argos](#) or [Amazon](#)
- Plastic covers that fit over the entire electrical fittings of a light switch or socket are available. It is then impossible to switch on the light or the electrical appliance without opening the cover [Fledglings](#) [Pluglock](#) [Safetots](#)
- Plug sockets can be recessed into the wall by a certified electrician.

Electrical Products

- TV screen protectors can protect your TV from sticky fingers, crayons and damage from items being thrown at it [babysecurity](#)



- Strong lockable TV cabinets with unbreakable front panels can house your TV and other units to keep the buttons, wires and electrics safely away from inquisitive children. Some can also be wall mounted. Tough Furniture is a company that makes specialist robust furniture [Toughfurniture](#)
- Children may be fascinated or distracted by trailing cables. A cable tidy is a protective sheath that is designed to encase wires and cables. This prevents children from being able to chew or pull-on wires [Amazon](#) [babysecurity](#) or local DIY shops.
- A cable bridge is a range of rigid plastic cable bridges that can be fixed to floors, walls or desks using screws or double-sided tape.

Window Safety

Children with additional needs may have a reduced sense of awareness of danger and measures may be needed to protect children from cuts and injuries sustained through falls.

General Considerations:

- It's advisable to keep the area below the windows clear of furniture to prevent your child from climbing.
- Before fitting any extra locks, fire safety should be taken into consideration. A risk assessment may be carried out by an Occupational Therapist.

Examples of Possible Solutions:



- Glass safety film can be fitted onto windows. It strengthens glass against breakage and broken glass sticks to it. This is available from various internet suppliers including [safetots](#) and [Amazon](#)
- Windows may need to be kept locked while your child is in the room and opened for air ventilation when your child is safely away from the room.
- Windows can be locked by fitting a lockable handle with a key. The key will need to be kept in a safe place and stored in accordance with any fire safety advice received.
- Windows can be locked by fitting window restrictors. These will allow you to open your windows for ventilation if required whilst remaining locked. Window restrictors are available commercially and come in a variety of designs. Some are more discreet than others if your child would be tempted to tamper with one. Some are more robust than others if your child is very destructive. Examples of suppliers are [Argos](#) [Safetots](#) [Jackloc](#) [Clippsafe](#) and [Homesecureshop](#)
- If it's not possible to lock windows, an alarm can be fitted to alert you if your child opens the window. Window alarms are available commercially including from [Fledglings](#) and [Amazon](#)
- For children who have a tendency to pull on curtain rails curtains can be held up with Velcro attachments. Alternative curtain rails are available that are magnetically attached so can easily be reattached.
- If it is not possible to keep curtains or blinds in place, plastic adhesive window covering to give privacy whilst letting in light is available commercially [DIY](#) and [NEXT](#)



Gas, Radiators and exposed pipes safety

Children with additional needs may have a reduced sense of awareness of danger. They may be at risk of injuries from heat and sharp corners. The family may be exposed to noise when radiators or pipes are hit. Pipes can be easily damaged if they are continuously banged over a period of time.

General Considerations:

- Any gas or electrical work should be undertaken by a qualified competent person.

Examples of Possible Solutions:

Radiators:

- Rearrange furniture to reduce access to the radiator.
- Extra strong brackets are needed if your child pulls radiators off the wall.
- Radiator covers and guards can be purchased. These are made from padded material that protects children from the heat of the radiator and from sharp edges.
- Radiators can be boxed in with purpose-made radiator covers (metal or wooden) to reduce the danger of burns and to limit the amount of noise if they are hit. For examples visit: [Coverad](#) and [Radshield](#)
- Low surface temperature radiators are now available from many suppliers to replace standard radiators.



Water Pipes and Cisterns:

- Water pipes can be boxed in by a tradesperson.
- Toilet cisterns can be concealed to prevent your child from opening and accessing the cistern water. This can also help to hide the toilet pipes.

Gas:

- Gas isolation switches enable you to switch off the gas with a key. This stops the flow of gas through the appliance, for example the cooker or fire when not in use.
- A locking cooker valve can be fitted free. This is a simple safety device that is fitted to existing gas cooker pipework and stops the gas supply. These can be fitted free regardless of your gas supplier.

Visit [SGN](#) for more information.

Fire Guards:

- Fire guards can be fitted wherever there is an open fire. Fireplace guards are simple to fit and come in a variety of sizes to fit most fireplaces. They are available commercially at [Argos](#) [Safetots](#) and other retailers.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms:

- These provide vital early warning and extra time to escape in the event of a fire or gas leaking. Ensure that the alarms and batteries are in working order. A free home fire safety visit can be requested from Fire and Rescue Service.



Garden Safety

Children with additional needs may have a reduced sense of awareness of danger and may be at risk of absconding from home garden areas. Your property may need additional or altered fencing and secure gates to enable your child to play safely in your garden, under appropriate adult supervision. The garden can be a useful outlet for extra energy.

General Considerations:

- Your child may still require a high level of supervision in the garden despite suitable safety measures being put in place.
- Positive discretion techniques e.g. sensory play equipment and toys may distract your child from climbing the fence or trying to abscond.
- Suitable door locks to external doors may resolve difficulties to ensure that your child is only in the garden when closely supervised.

Examples of Possible Solutions:

Fencing:

- Consider having large plants along the fence to deter your child from climbing the fence.
- Large wooden boards could be fixed to the inside of the fence to cover up arris rails (horizontal fencing support rails) to reduce climbing risks.



- Fencing that generally helps to prevent children from leaving a garden needs to be around 2 metres or 6 feet high with the arris rails on the outside. This reduces the chance of your child using the rails to climb over the fence.
- Planning permission may be required for rear garden fencing higher than 2 metres or 6 feet. There are also limitations on the height allowed for front garden fencing. To find out if planning permission is needed you can go to [Planning portal](#) or contact Development Control at your local council.
- Trellis on top of the fencing may increase the height of the fence.
- Bamboo and wicker fencing can be used to cover up the horizontal rail that connects the wooden posts and beams on a wooden fence.

Garden Gates:

- Where there is a risk that your child will leave through the garden gate, ensure that the gate has a lockable form of security that your child cannot access. For example, a sliding bolt with a padlock.
- You may be able to secure a large wooden board across the gate to cover the arris rails where your child may be using them to climb over the gate.

Outdoor Safety

Children with additional needs may have a reduced sense of awareness of danger and may need a form of safety restraint to protect them when outdoors.



General Considerations:

- Children with challenging behaviour should be closely supervised at all times when outdoor.
- Restrictions should be proportionate to risk.

Examples of Possible Solutions:

- Walking reins or wrist strap. These are available for older children from [Fledglings](#) and [Crelling](#)
Crelling offers a 14-day trial period. If the equipment is not returned, they will send an invoice. If it is returned there is a charge for postage and packing.
- The National Autistic Society (NAS) has some useful advice on its website [National Autistic Society](#) in relation to road safety and awareness of danger for people on the autism spectrum.
- Reins may not be sufficient for some children who could be safer using a buggy or wheelchair and the child may also have some mobility difficulties. Wheelchair services require a referral from a health professional.
- You may be able to apply for a blue badge parking concession so that your child doesn't have to walk too far. Further information on eligibility criteria and how to apply is available online at [Blue Badge scheme – Herefordshire Council](#)



We do hope that you have found something in this pack to help you plan for your child and family's safety in the home. If you are worried that the risk is too high in some areas, then you need to get professional advice and support.

In some cases, there are no quick fixes and the family and the professional will need to work together to find solutions to the problems.

To ensure your child's safety in various settings, behavioural management strategies and techniques are essential.

Information for this document has been gathered from many sources. Special thanks and reference for the content of this leaflet to Stockport NHS Foundation Trust.

Your experience matters

We aim to provide the care that we would want for ourselves, our families and friends. If you think something could have been done differently, please speak to the department or ward staff. You can contact them by calling the hospital switchboard and asking for the relevant department. Further information about our services is available on our website:

- **Phone (hospital switchboard):** 01432 355444
- **Wye Valley NHS Trust** www.wyevalley.nhs.uk

This leaflet is available in alternative formats. If you need this, please contact the Patient Experience Team using the telephone number or email below.

After using our services, we may ask for your opinion about your experience. Your feedback helps us to make things better for all our patients. You can also contact the Patient Experience Team by:

- **Phone:** 01432 372986 (please leave an answerphone message)
- **Email:** PALs@wvt.nhs.uk

