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A Minute of Inattention – a Lifetime of Regret

Children rarely see the dangers – adults always should

This article turned out to be rather longer than I imagined; but if you have children, or care for them at any time, please read on – it may prove to be a life saver.

It could be said that the early years of childhood are times of wonder and discovery. They are that certainly; but there are dangers lurking around every corner; on every shelf; in every cupboard. The problem is that littlies are endowed with boundless curiosity because this is how they learn. Whatever is seen and is available has to be investigated; and, make no mistake, they have eagle eyes that watch parents and carers going about their daily chores, maybe even taking pills and medication.

- ☠ Never leave pills and medicine where a child can reach them.
- ☠ Ensure that dangerous chemicals and cleaning products are secured in child-proof cupboards and containers.

Grown-ups should be aware that anything they do will likely be copied at some stage by the smallest member of the family; and this can have dire consequences. A simple example is the standard toaster. They see mum putting a couple of slices of bread into it and, bingo, in minutes up pops the toast. In the old days, to a child the VCR looked similar and they'd seen things being pushed into the slot at the front. So, they reasoned, why not try it with their sandwich and have a toasted one? The consequences were probably just inconvenient and financial for the adults, and fairly harmless for the child; unless, that is, they decided to try extracting the bread with some metal object like a paper knife that had been left lying about. If electrocution is the result, we all know who is to blame. The same danger is present with anything electrical, be it an appliance or simply a wall socket. Here is something else you push things into. Big people do it, so why not give it a go?

- ☠ Whenever possible, electrical appliances that are within the reach of children should be switched off and the plugs removed from wall sockets.
- ☠ Wall sockets without plugs pushed in should be blocked off – plastic security covers are available from some electrical stores.

Young children employ taste as a major sampling aid; so generally, anything new they come across goes straight to the mouth so that they can try it out. Toys come with warnings on wrappers and packets stating clearly that some are not recommended for those under a certain age. Usually this is because they have small parts that could be removed and swallowed. Electronic toys are very popular, and the battery-operated ones would seem to be fairly safe. They probably are, until the battery cover becomes

detached. It might happen inadvertently when the toy is dropped; or in some cases the curious child may attempt to deliberately remove the cover. Once off, the batteries are exposed. The flat, hearing-aid type look just like sweets and are easily swallowed; and even the bigger AA and AAA are tempting to try. These things are not like your average foreign object which can pass through the body's system in a day or two without serious consequences. Batteries are corrosive, poisonous, and can be deadly if ingested.

- ☠ Don't let a young child play with anything that will hurt them if placed in their mouth.
- ☠ Don't let them have access to anything small enough to swallow.
- ☠ Never allow them to play unsupervised with battery-powered toys and gadgets.

We have seen instances of young children climbing up a heavy piece of furniture like a wooden chest and using the opened drawers as a step-ladder. In more than one case the result was that the child's weight shifted the centre of gravity of the chest which tipped over, right on top of the kid. Another situation involved a TV sitting on what was assumed to be a high spot out of a child's reach. Not so for the inventive kid who made use of a handy stool and eventually toppled the monitor.

- ☠ Secure furniture and heavy objects that a child might topple.
- ☠ Don't leave dangerous objects or medication in the drawers of furniture which a child might pull out to use as a climbing aid.

All too often our evening news reports on a child's terrible injuries, sometimes death; and all because someone climbed into a car and reversed over a little one playing on the driveway. The youngster wasn't visible in the mirrors; and we as viewers were left to puzzle why any child was allowed to play in such a dangerous area unsupervised; and also why nobody thought to check that the child was out of harm's way. The devastated parents of these tragedies then pleaded with others not to make the same mistake they did. The fact that similar incidents continue to occur would suggest that the message isn't getting through to some.

- ☠ Always ensure small children are not playing in the driveway when moving your car. Walk around first – don't rely on mirrors which may not pick them up.
- ☠ Don't allow children to sit in the car on their own.
- ☠ Never leave the keys in an accessible place or in the ignition.
- ☠ Keep an eye on kids playing out the front close to a roadway, even if it's not a busy one.

Kitchens are a wonder for young children who can see Mum or Dad preparing food; and, of course, they love helping. That's fine as long as they are supervised and are not allowed near hot pans and dishes; and never let them stand on a stool stirring something heating on the stove top. Electrical devices such as mixers and food processors may seem like fun, but they can cause injuries. As for electric carving knives, mincers and meat slicers, these can take little fingers off!

- ☠️ When cooking, or there is food heating in the oven, don't permit a young child to be in the kitchen.
- ☠️ Keep the handles of pans on the stove top turned away so that they are out of reach.
- ☠️ Don't leave sharp knives and utensils where a child can pick them up.
- ☠️ Even when switched off and unplugged, any device that has sharp cutting blades is a danger for a child.
- ☠️ Definitely don't let a child anywhere near an electric toaster or grill.

Water and kids do mix, as long as the youngsters are under the watchful eye of a responsible adult, and constantly. All too often we hear of a kiddie drowning in a backyard pool simply because the person supposedly looking after them turned away for just a second, or so they claimed. Splasher pools aren't deep, but it only needs a few inches of water for a small child to drown in. Bath-time should be fun, provided an adult is right there in case the child slips. As for the beach, even if children are playing in a group, they need an adult or two close at hand, just in case.

- ☠️ Ensure backyard pools are securely fenced with child-proof gates.
- ☠️ Never leave a child alone in a bath or splasher pool.
- ☠️ When at the beach, never take your eyes off the child, not even for a second.
- ☠️ Also be careful when children are running under backyard sprinklers, or squirting each other with the garden hose. See Healthy Living HL55 on Meningitis.

Never, never forget the fire hazards. Candles may look nice, as do open fires; but leave children alone with them and you are courting disaster!

- ☠️ Don't let kids have access to lighters, matches; or anything that can spark a fire.

There are countless more hazards for inquisitive young children. Adults should be mindful of this, never taking it for granted that a simple verbal warning will do the trick. Even if they understand the possible dangers, children forget very quickly; as, I'm afraid, do adults on occasions; and their inattention may prove fatal for a child.

All carers of children need to be vigilant: every minute, every second of time spent with the young. A moment's distraction can prove disastrous; both for the child and for the adult who will regret forever their lapse of attention. Our children are the future, and it is their God-given right to live long enough to enjoy and fulfil a future of their own.

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