

# 4 SIMPLE STEPS TO A MEDICATION-SAFE HOME

As a parent, you do everything you can to keep your children safe. You cover electrical outlets when they start to crawl. You give them bicycle helmets when they learn to ride. You talk about what to do if a stranger approaches them in public. You do these things not because you believe something will happen, but because if anything goes wrong they are much less likely to be seriously hurt.

The same goes for something most of us have in our homes: over-the-counter and prescription medications. Medications can be helpful when used according to the directions on the label, but they can become deadly if someone takes too much—on purpose or by accident—or uses a medication prescribed for someone else.



## The risks to children under 5

More children are brought to the emergency room each year for potential medication poisoning than for car accidents. Most of them took medication when their caregiver wasn't looking.



## The risks to preteens and adolescents

Medication overdoses—of both over-the-counter and prescription medications—are the most common method of attempting suicide and the third most common cause of suicide death.

*These simple steps will help protect your children from serious harm.*

# 1 TALK WITH YOUR KIDS ABOUT MEDICATION SAFETY



Just like you teach your 6-year-old to look both ways before they cross the street and sit your teen down to talk about drinking, you need to teach your children how to use medicines safely.

### Key points for kids under 10

- Medications should be used only when they are needed.
- Adults are in charge of giving you medication when you need it.
- You should never take medication given to you by someone other than your caregivers.

### Key points for teens and tweens

- If they take over-the-counter or prescription medications on their own, they should take them only when they need to and follow the directions on the label. Read dosing amounts and timing together to make sure they understand the correct dose and how often they can safely take it.

## 2 KEEP ONLY SMALL AMOUNTS ON HAND



- A lot of over-the-counter medications, which are safe when used as directed, can become lethal in larger amounts—and those amounts may be smaller than you realize.
- Buy and keep small bottles on hand. If you need to buy in bulk, lock up most of the medication and keep only a small supply on hand. Your pediatrician or pharmacist can advise you on safe amounts.

## 3 LOCK UP MEDICATIONS



- Make sure safety caps are properly closed.
- Keep all medications locked away and out of sight so you can be in charge of when and how much your children take.
- Use a cash box or other lockable container. Local health departments sometimes give away lockboxes for free.
- Throw out expired medications or leftover prescriptions you no longer need. Many police departments and pharmacies have drop boxes for old or unused meds.

## 4 TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



Medication safety is important for all families, but it is especially important when you are concerned your child is struggling with their mental health.

Talk with your children about mental health. If you are concerned about them, ask directly if they have thought about harming themselves and reach out to a health-care provider you trust. It can be scary to start these conversations, but it gets easier with time and practice. Here are two guides for starting potentially lifesaving conversations:

- 10 Tips for Talking to Your Teen About Mental Health



- How to Ask Someone If They Are Thinking About Suicide



The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults, giving them the skills and support they need to thrive today—and tomorrow.

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