Teaching Your Kids First Aid

Children who know simple first aid may be more confident—and less likely to be injured in accidents. How young kids can learn first aid and how it is most effectively taught are what many parents, teachers and child care providers wonder. This Qwik Sheet will help you
- Introduce this important life skill in a way that is fun and worthwhile
- Use humor to relieve fear
- Reinforce lessons for greater retention of information and skills

Parenting Press has also included teaching tips that accommodate both the different ways in which children learn at different developmental levels, and your own personal style.

First aid is easy to teach

Even preschoolers can be taught to dial 9-1-1 and to apply direct pressure to a cut. As children learn the names of the parts of their bodies, they can be taught to take care of their bodies. Kids are excited about learning first aid because it’s one more step in becoming independent.

Model the skills you want to teach. With even a toddler, explain what you are doing: “First, I have to wash the dirt and blood from your scrape, and then...” and “Oops, I have a nose bleed. I need to pinch my nose for at least 10 minutes...”

Use news and personal experiences to suggest topics. If the television news shows a preschooler who called 9-1-1 to get help for his family, make sure your children hear the story and understand which situations require an emergency call. If you burn yourself on the barbecue, ask your children to describe the correct treatment (after the fact, if necessary).

Discuss the situations shown on television, and in movies, videos and books. Ask questions like, “Is that realistic? If you tripped like that character did, do you think you’d get hurt?”

Participate in safety and first aid related tours and events. Take your kids to the fire station open house when they can climb in the fire engine and see firefighters demonstrate “stop, drop and roll.” Attend water safety events at your local pool and the “teddy bear clinics” at hospitals. Encourage school-age kids to participate in scout, Camp Fire and Red Cross first aid classes.

First aid techniques to teach kids

As soon as children use telephones, they can be taught to call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Most phones can be programmed so that your child only has to push one or two buttons.

Teach a child what to say when an emergency operator answers: why help is needed (“My mom fell down and she can’t move her leg” or “The house next door is on fire”), the child’s name, and, if necessary, where help is needed (“We are upstairs in our house” or “We are by the tennis courts in the park”).

Because at least half of emergency calls now come from wireless (cellular) telephones and not all cellular service companies can identify the location of the caller, your children should know your address and phone number.

This information should be posted by your telephone at home along with all emergency numbers: 9-1-1, the poison center, and your own health care provider’s office and after-hours contact.

Kids should also learn how to describe where they are if they must call 9-1-1 when they are not at home (“the Green Lake tennis courts”) because even enhanced 9-1-1 service cannot provide exact locations of callers using cell phones.

Starting at about age 4, children can also be taught how to handle:

- nose bleeds
- bleeding
- broken bones
- dog bites
- snake bites
- poisoning
- insect stings
- chemicals in the eye
- choking
- electric shock
- burns
- clothing on fire
- unconsciousness
Teaching methods to use

Besides modelling first aid techniques and taking advantage of the situations your children are exposed to, you can read first aid instructions to them from books like *Kids to the Rescue: First Aid Techniques for Kids* and watch how-to videos together. Teach kids the common acronyms for treatments such as:

- **R-I-C-E:** *Rest* the injured area, *ice* it for 20 minutes for the first 24 hours, lightly *compress* it with a bandage, and *elevate* over the level of the heart.
- **Stop, Drop, Roll:** If your body or clothes are on fire, *stop*, *drop* to the ground, and *roll* until the fire is extinguished. Cover your face and mouth to protect them and to keep from swallowing smoke.

Have children practice the first aid techniques shown in books and on screen using dolls, stuffed animals and each other. To simulate emergencies:

- Slap red felt blob-shapes on legs or arms with double-sided tape for “bloody” wounds
- Daub catsup in a nostril for a “bloody” nose
- Stuff a rolled-up rag into a sock for a “swelling”

If your children are studying health at school, bring out the family first aid kit and discuss what each of the bandages, instruments and medicines is used for.

If you don’t have a first aid kit in the house, car or in your camping gear, older kids can help you list what should be in the kit. Remember family-specific medications for those who are diabetic, allergic to bee stings or suffer from exercise-induced asthma.

When there is a minor medical problem for you or other family members, ask a child to administer the first aid while you watch.

Reinforcing first aid skills

To determine how much your children have learned and review important information:

- ask one child to explain to another how to handle an emergency situation
- videotape your child treating a friend’s mock injury and then review the tape with all of the children, asking what could have been done better or more safely
- tell your kids it’s “quiz time,” set the kitchen timer and give each child a certain time period to respond to a question about safety or an emergency situation
- create a “what if” game where kids draw cards and explain how to handle the situations described on the cards (when you need a makeshift splint, for example)
- have an emergency drill in your house (just as local governments have mock earthquakes and disasters) where the kids will have to treat you or another adult who pretends to faint or choke or spurts catsup “blood.”
- switch roles: let your child give you step-by-step instructions on which first aid techniques to use in a mock emergency
- have kids write a first aid quiz for you to take and then correct your answers

Other Resources


Stop, Drop, Roll poster from the National Fire Protection Association, http://sparky.org/PDF/StopDropRoll_E.pdf