

# 10 TIPS FOR KEEPING KIDS SAFE

from infancy to adolescence



Blue Ribbon  
Campaign to  
Prevent Child  
Abuse & Neglect

## Fairfax County Department of Family Services

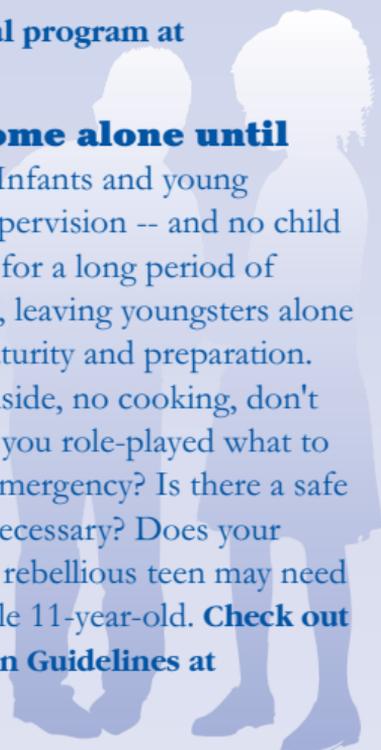
Every parent feels overwhelmed at times. When it happens, ask for help! Relatives, friends, religious advisors, your doctor and other professionals will understand. In addition, here are 10 tips and some helpful resources.

**1. Never shake a baby.** Vigorously shaking a baby by the arms, legs, chest or shoulders can cause brain damage or blindness. These injuries are called "shaken baby syndrome." An estimated 50,000 cases occur in the U.S. each year, and one in four shaken babies dies from this abuse.

**2. Put healthy babies down to sleep on their backs.** Medical experts believe putting healthy babies down to sleep on their backs may reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Ask your doctor about the best sleep position for your baby. **For more information, call the National SIDS/Infant Death Resource Center at 1-866-866-7437 or visit [www.sidscenter.org](http://www.sidscenter.org).**

**3. Be careful who cares for your child.** Sadly, unrelated caretakers, including immature babysitters or a parent's boyfriend or girlfriend, harm too many children. Choose experienced, responsible caregivers who like children. Discuss your child's needs, habits and schedule. Communicate your rules and expectations of the caregiver. Make sure the caretaker knows what to do in an emergency, and check in frequently to monitor your child's well being. **For more information, contact the Office for Children Child Care Assistance and Referral program at 703-449-8484; TTY 703-222-9452.**

**4. Don't leave children home alone until they can be responsible.** Infants and young children need full-time care and supervision -- and no child or young teen should be left alone for a long period of time, such as overnight. Otherwise, leaving youngsters alone for short periods is a matter of maturity and preparation. Can your child follow rules (stay inside, no cooking, don't open the door to strangers)? Have you role-played what to do in case of fire, injury or other emergency? Is there a safe place to go, such as next door, if necessary? Does your child know how to contact you? A rebellious teen may need more supervision than a responsible 11-year-old. **Check out Fairfax County's Child Supervision Guidelines at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs).**



**5. Never leave children alone in a car.** In summer, a closed car can quickly heat up to dangerous levels. In winter, a closed car left running can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Children alone in cars are also easy targets for carjackers or kidnappers.

**6. Know how to spot a depressed child.** In the U.S., nearly 2,000 youngsters, ages 10 - 19, committed suicide in 2000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Depression is often a factor. Watch for: persistent sadness and/or irritability; low self-esteem or feelings of worthlessness; increase or decrease in activity, eating, or sleeping; loss of interest in favorite activities; difficulty concentrating; anger and rage; headaches, stomach aches, or other physical pains that seem to have no cause; preoccupation with death or suicide. If your child or teen has two or more of these symptoms, ask your doctor to refer you to a mental health professional, or call **Public Mental Health Treatment Information and Referral at 703-481-4230; Spanish 703-799-2838; TTY 703-481-4110.**

**7. Learn about child development.** Learning what you can reasonably expect from children at each growth stage makes parenting easier. For helpful information about child development, visit your local library, bookstore or the Internet at **Zero to Three® - [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org); National Association for the Education of Young Children - [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org). Or call 1-800-CHILDREN (245-3736).**

**8. Help for parents and teens during the adolescent years.** Adolescence can be a challenging time for both parents and teens. Here are some 24 hour, 7 days a week resources that may be helpful: **Alternative House counseling hotline, 1-800-SAY-TEEN (729-8336); Crisis Link/Teen Hotline, 703-527-4077.**

**9. Use discipline to teach.** No one is born with good judgment or self-control. Over many years, children develop these skills through training and guidance from caring adults. Discipline is an important teaching tool. It involves being consistent, setting limits and giving age appropriate choices. **For advice, seek out books available on effective discipline of children and teens or find a local parenting program at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs).**

**10. Child Protective Services Hotline: 703-324-7400; TTY 703-222-9452; [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs)**



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To request reasonable accommodations, call 703-324-7400; TTY 703-222-9452. To request this information in an alternate format, call 703-324-5870; TTY 703-222-9452.

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