

Camping Safety for Your Family!

Campfires, camping gear and hiking trails present special safety considerations for families with children. While the preparations for a family camping trip should include a review of safety guidelines for outdoor recreation, water and falls, parents should also pay attention to potential hazards specific to camping and hiking.

“Camping is the only situation where a family is purposely starting a fire outdoors a long way from a pressurized water supply or the nearest fire engine,” says Shawneri Guzman, Safe Kids Snohomish County coordinator. “A campfire is a serious responsibility.”

In addition to the danger of starting an uncontrolled brush fire, campfires — as well as portable stoves, heaters and fuel-burning lanterns — produce carbon monoxide, an odorless gas that can poison a child very quickly. “About 30 campers each year die of carbon monoxide poisoning,” says Guzman. “If someone near a campfire or portable stove seems drowsy, disoriented or sick, move that person away from the fire immediately to get some fresh air.”

In addition, Safe Kids Snohomish County recommends these precautions around campfires and portable heating devices:

- Always actively supervise children near a campfire or portable stove. Follow posted rules about campfires, and do not light fires in windy or excessively dry conditions.
- Keep a bucket of water and shovel near the fire at all times and extinguish the fire completely before going to sleep or leaving the site.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children’s reach.
- Never use matches, lighters, candles or any device powered by kerosene, propane or other heating fuel inside a tent or camper.

Also keep these precautions in mind around the campsite and on the trail:

- Keep first aid supplies and emergency phone numbers handy, and know where the nearest phone is located. Cell phones might not work in remote areas. Let friends and relatives know where you’re going and when you’re coming home.
- Dress children in layers of clothing to help prevent heat-related illness and hypothermia. A child’s body temperature changes faster than an adult’s.
- Never let children hike alone.

- Don't push kids to go on a longer or more strenuous hike than they can handle. Exhausted children are more likely to fall, wander off or otherwise get injured. Bring plenty of drinking water or sports drinks and high-energy snacks.
- Kids should wear hiking boots and clothing that offers protection from scrapes, bites and poisonous plants. Following the manufacturer's instructions, apply insect repellent to a child's clothing and exposed skin.

Apply sunscreen rated SPF 15 or higher to your child's exposed skin 15 to 30 minutes before going out, and reapply frequently. (It is possible to get sunburned in cloudy conditions.)

For more information about outdoor recreation safety, call 425-261-3047 or visit www.snosafekids.org or www.usa.safekids.org.

