



CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Ways to protect your kids from environmental harms



By Jane Sutter

Did you know that children are at greater risk than adults from chemicals found in food, water, dirt and air?

That's because:

- For their size, children eat, drink and breathe more than adults.
- They crawl on floors, play in dirt, and put their hands in their mouths.
- Their bodies are still developing.

The above information comes from the New York State Department of Health, which offers a lot of helpful ideas on keeping children and teens safe.

Another resource is the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN), a national multi-disciplinary organization whose mission is to protect the developing child from environmental hazards and pro-

mote a healthier environment.

Kristie Trousdale, CEHN deputy director, points out that "children are susceptible to disruptions in their organ development" by exposure to harmful chemicals in products, along with water and air. Exposure can lead to children developing certain childhood cancers such as leukemias, learning disabilities, cognitive or behavioral problems, respiratory issues such as asthma, reproductive health harm and other troubles.

"There are a number of different health effects of concern just with chemicals present in our homes and around our homes and in our schools and childcare centers," Trousdale said.

Take cleaning products for example. How can parents get a good handle on what products are safe and what are not? Trousdale readily admits that the prospect can feel dif-

ficult, even for a professional like herself who works in the field of environmental health.

"What we definitely don't want to do is have folks feel overwhelmed," Trousdale said. "Choose somewhere to start and take some simple steps, things that you can do right now that are quick and painless. You don't have to get rid of every cleaner you've got."

She recommends parents look for certifications on products from organizations like Green Seal or the Environmental Protection Agency's Safer Choice program. One option is to make your own environmental cleaners using items like white vinegar, baking soda and distilled water. Simply do an internet search to find recipes and ideas from a trusted source. "You don't have to spend a ton of money buying really expensive, well-marketed, supposedly green cleaning products,"

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Trousdale said.

Parents should also understand the differences between sanitizing and disinfecting, Trousdale said. (See definitions at the end of this article.) "Another important thing for people to remember is that you have to use the product according to the directions that are on the bottle. A lot of time people are misusing things and that can really increase the risk" of harm.

Home building

When it comes to home building or remodeling projects, parents should explore non-toxic options, Trousdale said. "We advise people not to install wall-to-wall carpeting because little ones are crawling around and they are putting their mouths in their hands and carpeting collects all the dust." Dust trapped in carpet can have a lot of contaminants including lead and pesticides.

If parents really want carpeting in the home, Trousdale recommends looking for manufacturers that meet best practices, such as those listed on the website of the non-profit Habitable.



There is another concern that goes beyond the type of flooring, too. "It's not just what the carpeting or flooring is made of, it's how it's installed," Trousdale noted. Adhesives may have volatile compounds that family members are breathing in.

Focus on food

Purchasing organic food is a good way to help reduce pesticide exposure, but Trousdale recognizes that such foods are often more expensive. "We know that a lot of peo-

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Kid-Friendly Practices

The following tips come from New York State Department of Health's brochure called "Reducing Environmental Exposures: The Seven Best Kid-Friendly Practices." Go to <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2818/> to download a PDF version with much more information.

Keep Kids Away

- Household products such as glass cleaners, oven cleaners, floor/furniture polish, bleaches, etc.: Put locks on cabinets and store products out of children's reach. Dispose of unused and unwanted products properly. Download the booklet "Managing and Disposing of Household Hazardous Waste" at https://extapps.dec.ny.gov/docs/materials_minerals_pdf/hhwma.pdf
- Pesticides such as flea/tick controls, lawn pesticides and indoor pesticides: Read and follow directions on the product label carefully. Keep children away from areas where pesticides and spray or spot treatments are being used. Remove toys and stuffed animals before you treat the area. Children should not touch flea/tick collars or any repellents used on your pets.

Wet, Wipe and Wash

- Contaminants on and in food, such as bacteria and pesticides: Wash fruits and vegetables under running water before eating, cutting or cooking. Do not use soap or commercial produce washes. It's not necessary and may contribute to greater chemical residues. To find out what produce has the most contaminants, check out the "Dirty Dozen List" at <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/dirty-dozen.php>
- Lead dust and chemical residues: Wash your hands, your children's hands and toys with soap and water frequently. Damp

mop floors. Wash windowsills, including the area between the sill and the outside window or screen.

Spend time in nature

In much of the Diocese of Rochester, we are blessed with a variety of opportunities for kids and families to access clean air. According to CEHN, "learning and playing in the natural outdoor environment offers children fresh air, opportunities to learn about nature, larger spaces for physical activity, and stimulation of their senses. Access to clean, natural places can help address physical and mental health concerns by increasing physical activity, improving focus and enhancing cognitive growth. Time spent in nature can lower children's stress, depression and anxiety and increase self-efficacy." Here are some of the tips listed at <https://cehn.org/access-to-nature/>.

- Take regular trips to nearby parks, forests or nature reserves where kids can explore safely and enjoy outdoor activities.
- If you have space, consider setting up a small garden in your backyard, in neighborhood schools or your community. It can be a fun way for kids to learn about plants and nature.
- Plan family walks or hikes in natural settings, like forests, trails or beaches.
- Participate in community events focused on cleaning up parks or beaches.
- Advocate for more green spaces in urban areas and safe access for all children.
- Vote for candidates who support conservation, climate resilience, urban greenspace and the protection of public lands.



ple can't afford to buy everything organic. We know that washing does help remove unnecessary pesticides. We tell people to focus on the Clean 15 and Dirty Dozen list (of foods that are least and most contaminated). Environmental Working Group does a good job putting out these lists every year" based on pesticide residue studies by U.S. agencies.

Trousdale suggests that if people can't afford to buy all organic produce, they should pick a few areas to focus on. "So, you can say, 'for apples and strawberries, I'm only going to buy organic.'"

Outdoors

In many neighborhoods in the United States, there is a big emphasis on having what's deemed a perfect-looking lawn. But achieving that may involve using harmful pesticides, which can be carried in the air well beyond one homeowner's property.

"Instead of (having) a lawn, try having land-

The difference between cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting

Knowing when to clean, sanitize and disinfect surfaces in your home is key to preventing the spread of disease. Always follow the directions on product labels to ensure safe and effective use.

Cleaning physically removes most germs, dirt and impurities from objects and surfaces. Use soap or detergents with water to scrub, wash and rinse. Cleaning should be performed regularly and always comes before sanitizing or disinfecting projects and surfaces.

Sanitizing reduces the number of germs on objects and surfaces to levels considered safe. Use weaker bleach solutions or sanitizing sprays. Objects or surfaces should be cleaned first before sanitizing. Sanitize objects and surfaces that come in contact with mouths (such as toys, infant feeding supplies, countertops and other surfaces that touch food).

Disinfecting kills remaining germs on surfaces. Killing germs can further lower the risk of spreading disease. Use an EPA-registered disinfecting product or a stronger bleach solution. Objects or surfaces should be cleaned first before disinfecting. Disinfect surfaces when someone is sick or if someone is at higher risk of getting sick due to a weakened immune system.

Source: Centers for Disease Control

scaping that is using your native flora, that matches the environment that you are in that is not just better for your children's health but for the ecosystem that is right there, for the bees and other pollinators," Trousdale said.

Another big problem is mosquito spraying, which can have harmful toxins. Trousdale recommends that people review their yards for standing water where mosquitoes can breed, and ask their neighbors to do so too. The CEHN website offers a fact-

sheet on pesticides and integrated pest management.

The bottom line for parents who want to focus on making their kids' surroundings healthier is "to do what is feasible for you now, and maybe down the road try something else" to help kids develop in the healthiest way possible, Trousdale said.

Jane Sutter is a Rochester-based freelance writer.

For more information

Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN)

The Eco-Healthy Child Care™ division of the Children's Environmental Health Network <https://cehn.org/> has dozens of fact sheets and Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) documents with helpful information. Topics include household chemicals, air quality, making celebrations healthy, crib mattresses, to name just a few. Go to <https://cehn.org/ehcc-factsheets-toxicants-faqs/> to download.

CEHN also offers toolkits for parents and educators. Go to <https://cehn.org/resources/parent-educator-toolkit/> to download.

The Eco-Healthy Child Care™ runs an endorsement program that delivers technical assistance, training and resources to childcare professionals to help reduce environmental hazards within childcare settings. Childcare facilities, including in-home daycares, which comply with 30 out of 35 simple, free or low-cost environmentally healthy best practices found on a checklist can receive certification. More informa-

tion can be found at <https://cehn.org/eco-healthy-child-care-ehcc/>

Habitable

This non-profit offers product guidance on building materials and home furnishings, including flooring: <https://informed.habitablefuture.org/product-guidance>

Environmental Working Group

EWG has a variety of resources including lists of the "Dirty dozen" and "Clean 15" fruits and vegetables. Go to <https://www.ewg.org/>

EWG has a free app called Healthy Living that can be used to scan bar codes to get ratings for more than 130,000 products.

Children Environmental Health Centers

Another good resource is the New York State Children's Environmental Health Centers, which has a center at the Golisano Children's Hospital in Rochester. For downloadable information to help parents address common environmental concerns, go to <https://nyscheck.org/rocrx/>.



5 FIVE WAYS

to protect your children from sexual abuse

Parents play the primary role in educating their children about sexual abuse. Here are 5 tips for teaching safety to the little ones God has entrusted to you.

1

Keep it practical. Teach your children the differences between safe touches and unsafe touches.

2

Tell your children that saying “no” is okay. Empower your children to say “no” if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or touches them inappropriately.

3

Give your children a way to alert you. Tell your children they can use an excuse or share a special “code-word” with you to alert you about an unsafe person or situation.

4

Tell your children to report an unsafe touch.

Let your children know they should tell you if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe around any adult or peer. You can also identify other adults they can tell about unsafe touches.

5

Tell your children you trust them. If your child makes a report to you, believe him or her. Tell them it is not their fault and that you love them. Immediately bring the allegation to the attention of public authorities.



Promise to Protect

Pledge to Heal



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:
Tammy Sylvester

Diocesan Coordinator of Safe Environment Education and Compliance
585-328-3228
Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org.

Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.

To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:

Deborah Housel
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,
ext. 1555
victimsassistance@dor.org.

All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>
PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.

NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>
A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

FOR PARENTS:

Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>
A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education

Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>
Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies

Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>
Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Bivona Child Advocacy Center
(Monroe, Wayne counties):
www.BivonaCAC.org
585-935-7800

Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:
607-737-8449
www.chemungcounty.com

Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:
315-253-9795
www.cacofcayugacounty.org

Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program
(Ontario County):
www.cacfingerlakes.org
315-548-3232

Darkness to Light organization:
www.d2l.org

STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:
www.sthcs.org
716-372-8532

NYS State Central Registry
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):
1-800-342-3720

NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)
866-313-3013

Tompkins County Advocacy Center:
www.theadvocacycenter.org
607-277-3203

Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:
585-786-8846

Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:
315-531-3417, Ext. 6