



Farm And Ranch Safety For Children

Injuries on farms or ranches happen when a child is doing something that is beyond his or her mental, physical or emotional ability. A child's desire to do "grown-up" work may exceed his or her development and ability.

Children pass through a series of developmental stages that take them from toddler to teenager. The physical changes are obvious, as a child grows taller and stronger. But along with the physical changes come changes in mental and emotional development that are sometimes harder to recognize.

A toddler may be barely able to talk, but she is an active, engaged learner who is driven to explore her world as directly as she can. If she sees someone hide a colorful bottle in a cabinet, she will do her best to get at it, open the bottle and taste its contents, even if she has been warned not to and even if the bottle contains poison. Preschool children can't be expected to understand cause and effect, because they're not developmentally ready to do so.

If parents of very young children understand such characteristics, they can take the right precautions, such as using childproof locks on cabinets containing cleaning fluids or farm chemicals. Toddlers need physical barriers, such as fences, gates and locks, to keep them away from dangerous areas.

Teenagers, on the other hand, are mentally equipped to understand that risky behavior often has unpleasant consequences. But they are often driven to ignore common sense to satisfy the emotional need for experimentation that is typical of that age. A 16-year-old who drives his father's pickup too fast down a country road probably knows the speed limit. He's speeding because he wants to. He may also be speeding for thrills.

Parents of teenagers must acknowledge this need for excitement and experimentation and supply safe challenges for their maturing teens. Sports, teen activities and trips into the city can all help satisfy these needs.

Age-appropriate activities can reduce the risk of accidents

By understanding the stages of a child's growth and development and providing careful supervision and training that's right for each stage, you can help protect your children from injury.

The following chart describes the typical developmental stages and risks that children at each stage may take, and the appropriate protection measures you can take. How well does the chart describe the youngest farmers/ranchers in your household or community?

	Characteristics	Typical Risks	Protective Measures
Toddler/ preschooler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Unable to understand cause and effect. » Doesn't understand the difference between real and make believe. » Fascinated by movement or moving parts. » May love to climb. » Curious. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Drinking or eating poison. » Falling off farm equipment or pickup trucks. » Drowning in ponds or manure pits. » Wandering onto highways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Careful supervision at home or childcare. » Using physical barriers such as locks and fences. » Safe distractions. » Prohibiting riding on farm machinery.
Early school age (5-9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inconsistent use of logic. » Wishes to appear competent. » Wants adult approval. » Not aware of realistic dangers. More fearful of kidnapping or war than of much more likely farm accident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Being kicked or crushed by livestock. » Getting entangled in augers, power take-off shafts or other moving machinery. » Falling out of tractors or pickups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Consistent rules. » Discussion of what constitutes safe behavior. » Assignment of simple farm chores, with careful supervision. » Bike safety training and use of bicycle helmet.
Older school age (10-13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Greater physical and mental skills. » Physical development may outstrip mental or emotional maturity. » Wants social and peer group acceptance. » Wishes to practice new skills without constant adult supervision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Operating machinery designed for adults. » Being struck by a car while riding a bicycle. » Falling from a hayloft or ladder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Consistent rules, with consequences for infractions and rewards for safe behavior. » Bike safety classes; use of helmets. » Deliberate, planned increases in chores and responsibilities. » Specific education on farm hazard avoidance.
Adolescent (13-16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Desire to experiment. » Strong need for peer acceptance. » Resistance to adult authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Machinery rollover or roadway accident. » Hearing loss from exposure to loud machinery. » Sustaining head or spine injuries from motorcycle or ATV accidents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Education from peers who have experienced injury or illness themselves. » Consistent rules, with predictable consequences for infractions and rewards for safe behavior. » Motorcycle and ATV safety education and use of helmets. » Involvement in farm safety projects through 4-H, FFA and other groups.
Young adult (16-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increasing sense of adult responsibility and competence. » Desire to be supportive, take on adult share of farm work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Same as adult risks: respiratory illness, tractor or machinery rollover or entanglement, hearing loss, muscle or bone injuries. » Additional risk from experimentation with alcohol or drugs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Clear and consistent rules regarding drugs and alcohol. » Rewards for acceptance of adult responsibilities. » Opportunity to be a role model, teaching younger children about farm safety.

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