

Wheelchair Safety Toolkit

This toolkit will help you:

- Understand the major wheelchair safety issues for kids
- Prepare to manage common wheelchair safety issues
- Establish safe habits for using a wheelchair
- Understand basic wheelchair driving skills
- Advocate for your Super Safe wheelchair user
- Share safety tips with classmates, friends and siblings



How to use this toolkit

Read and plan.

Read the entire toolkit and **make an action plan** for what you need to do. Do you need to gather tools and attach them to the wheelchair? Do you need to talk more about safety issues with your child? Print the toolkit and jot your ideas on the notes page.

Think about the skills your child needs to develop now to operate the wheelchair safely. Think about ways to involve your child's physical or occupational therapist, too.

Print and share.

The **Advocates & Allies** pages are great to share with adults who work with your child. Adults who care for your child or interact with your child regularly should understand what it means to be an ally and advocate for people with disabilities.

The **Wheelchair Safety for Friends** tool can be shared with family, siblings, friends and classmates as part of a discussion about wheelchair safety.

Celebrate success.

When your child has mastered the beginner, intermediate and advanced skills, **print your child's Super Safe Kids certificate** to reward your child for mastering these skills.

Get more tools.

Visit www.supersafekidsbooks.com for beginner, intermediate and advanced skills guides and other tools.

New Wheelchair? **Start Here.**

A new wheelchair means you **and** your child have new safety skills to learn so they can be a Super Safe Kid.

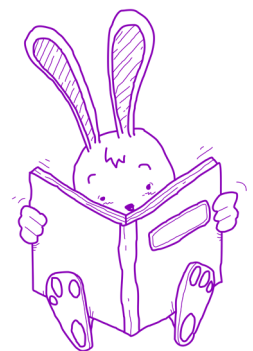
As your child practices using the wheelchair safely, navigating the home and traveling in the community will be easier and safer, and that's a great start to developing independent living skills for the future.

Here are some tips to get you started.

1

Read the user's manual (really).

User's manuals are not exciting reading, but knowing the mechanics of the chair and all its features will help you keep the chair operating safely, which is important to know **before** problems arise.



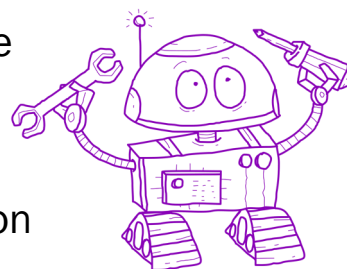
The manual shows you all the chair's major parts and how to operate and maintain the chair, along with how often to charge the chair and how to keep it running smoothly. You might want to download the manual and keep the document on your phone.

2

Be prepared.

Keep wrenches or tools for the wheelchair handy. Some families secure the tools to the wheelchair. Know how to use the tools to make adjustments or simple repairs like tightening a bolt or adjusting the chair.

Keep the phone number of the wheelchair vendor on hand, too, since they usually handle repairs. You should also have routine maintenance once a year.



3

Talk safety, think safety.

Do you remember learning to ride a bike or cross the street when you were a kid? The safety rules you learned back then have helped keep you safe for years.

As your Super Safe Kid gets used to the new wheelchair, talk about safety...a lot.

Wheelchair users—both kids and adults—deal with unique safety issues around the home and when they travel in the community. It's important for kids to understand these safety issues.

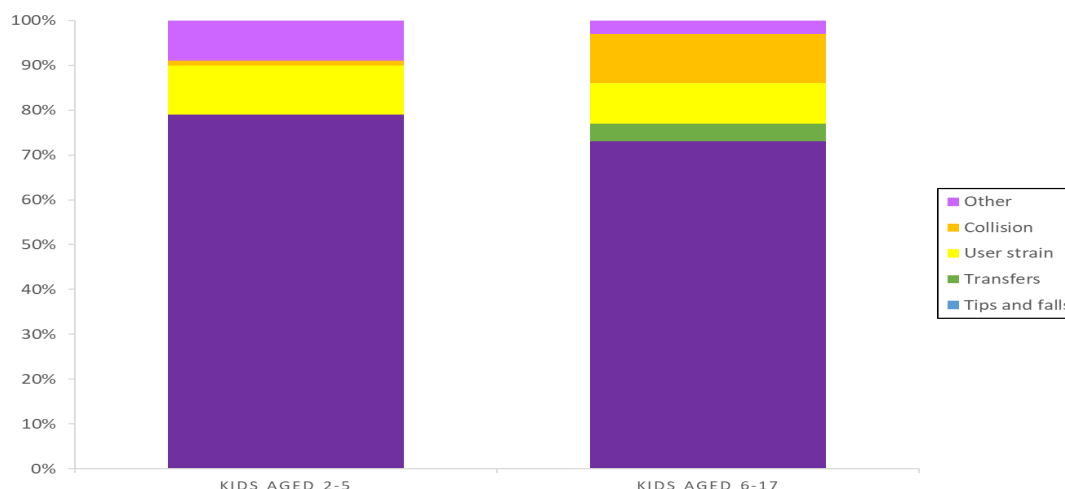
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Know your wheelchair safety facts.

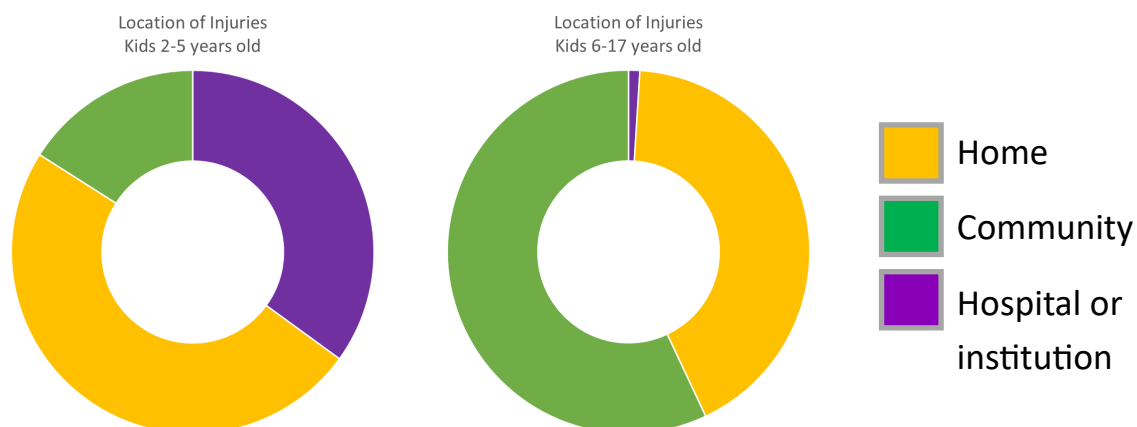
Tips and falls account for more than 70% of kids' wheelchair injuries. Most tips and falls happened on stairs, ramps and curbs, and many were related to chairs being in poor repair.

No matter what your child's age, the majority of wheelchair injuries happen at home or out in the community.

Types of Wheelchair Accidents



Where Wheelchair Accidents Happen



5 Have a safe and stable start.

The most common wheelchair related injuries come from tipping and falling, especially while getting into and out of the chair. That's why it's so important for you and your child to practice being safe during transfers. Depending on your child's mobility, making safe transfers might be mostly a grownup's responsibility.

Take these steps to help make transfers safer.

1. Make sure the path to the chair is clear, and keep the chair close so the child only needs to move a short distance to get to the chair. Think about which direction the chair needs to be facing.
2. Lock the brakes.
3. Turn off power (for power chairs).
4. Swing lateral supports, footrests and/or armrests out of the way for a smooth transfer.
5. If an adult needs to help with the transfer, lift with your back and legs. If you're using a lift or sling, follow instructions to use it safely.
6. Buckle or strap the child in immediately. Make sure the straps fit snugly and comfortably.



If transfers are a challenge, your child's physical therapist can help you plan and practice safe transfers.

6

Make a training plan.

Your Super Safe Kid can learn to operate a new wheelchair and build new skills over time. Make a training plan to track your child's progress through beginner, intermediate and advanced skills.



Work on beginner wheelchair skills at home and in occupational or physical therapy. Your child's therapist can help you and your child practice wheelchair safety skills. The therapist can help your child practice getting into and out of the chair safely, too.

Practice intermediate and advanced skills in public spaces. Your child can work with you and the therapist to practice advanced skills like using an elevator, using door switches and navigating hallways and obstacles.

Share your training plan with other family members and caregivers so they can all help your child practice using the wheelchair safely. You can also take your training plan to therapy to share progress notes and work on new goals with the therapist.

Beginner **Wheelchair Safety Skills**

Basic movement skills

- **Stopping on command**
- **Moving forward in a straight line**
- **Backing up in a straight line**
- **Moving left and right**



For power wheelchair users

Along with basic movement skills, power chair users need to learn about:

- **Turning the chair on and off**
- **Setting the speed**
- **Using the chair's features and functions**

Intermediate & Advanced Skills

Once your Super Safe Kid has mastered the basic skills for using the wheelchair, it's time to move on to intermediate and advanced skills.

Intermediate skills

Beyond steering and moving, intermediate skills include moving in tight spaces and navigating around obstacles, as well as using elevators, lifts, doors with switches, and navigating hallways and doorways.

Advanced skills

Traveling in the community outdoors requires advanced skills like using sidewalks and curb cuts, navigating crowds, and being safe around traffic.

Visit www.supersafekidsbooks.com for beginner, intermediate and advanced wheelchair safety tools and to buy *Power Wheelchair Safety for Kids*, a book that teaches kids advanced wheelchair safety skills for community travel.



Advocates & Allies

When your Super Safe Kid has a wheelchair, they become part of a whole community of people with disabilities. It's important to be aware of issues that affect the disabilities community because these issues affect your child, too.

Words matter.

Part of being an advocate or ally of a wheelchair user is thinking about the words we choose to describe disability.

Phrases like “wheelchair bound” and “confined to a wheelchair” make using a wheelchair seem tragic. These phrases are not true because a wheelchair is a way for people to experience **more** freedom and **not** be confined to one space. Instead, we can describe someone as a “wheelchair user.”



Advocating for accessibility at home

Having an accessible home and vehicle keeps your wheelchair user safer. There are many resources available for home and vehicle modifications. Talk to your child's doctor, therapist or social worker to learn more.

Advocates & Allies

Advocating for accessibility in public spaces

Public spaces like doctors' offices, movie theaters, retail stores and restaurants are required make their spaces accessible for people who use wheelchairs.

If you are visiting a new space with your wheelchair user, it's a good idea to call ahead and make sure the space is accessible.

1. Is your building accessible for wheelchair users?
2. Do you have doors that open with a switch for a wheelchair user?
3. Are the aisles wide enough for a wheelchair user to get through?



If you come across a space that is not accessible but should be, you can take steps to make it better.

1. Talk to the business owner and suggest ways to make the location more accessible. Show them why the space is hard to access.
2. Contact your councilperson, local leaders or advocacy organizations.

Wheelchair Safety **for Friends**

If you have a friend who uses a wheelchair, it's important to know how to be safe around the chair and help your friend be safe, too.

Your friend's wheelchair is really important because it helps them move around safely.

Keep your hands away.

The most important safety rule is that you should never try to push, move or sit in your friend's wheelchair. The chair is really awesome, and you might be very curious about it, but it's your friend's personal way of getting around and it's only for them. If you want to know more about the wheelchair, ask questions but don't touch.

Stay in the safe zone.

A wheelchair needs space to move. Keep your fingers and toes away from the wheels, and walk at a safe distance away from the chair. Your friend needs a little extra time to stop safely, so try not to stop suddenly in front of the wheelchair or run in front of it.

Be a good helper.

Your friend is learning how to use a wheelchair safely, and you can help. If you see your friend being unsafe in the wheelchair, tell a grownup and remind your friend of how to be safe. You can also help by opening doors and staying a safe distance from the moving chair.



Remember this!

Your child's wheelchair is an important part of their independence, not to mention an expensive piece of equipment. Handle it with care, and encourage others to do the same.

References

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