



Safety Up – On Children and Chores

Growing up on the farm provides fantastic learning opportunities for children. It also presents frequent safety hazards. In fact, 158 children aged one to 19 were killed and another 1,300 were seriously injured on Canadian farms between 1990 and 2000.

Farm tragedies involving children often seem unpredictable, stealing young lives randomly and unavoidably. However, the reality is that most farm injuries and fatalities are predictable and therefore can be prevented. The key is to assign chores appropriate to each child's stage of development, provide adequate training, and teach them to recognize and avoid hazards from day one. **Know the job. Know the hazard. Know the drill.**

Three steps to safe farming

As a parent, you need to teach your children to complete chores safely. One easy way to teach farm safety and keep it top of mind is to think of it as a three-step process that starts when you **know the job**. Knowing the job means getting instructions and practising ahead of time for each new chore. Once you have the skills to confidently perform the job, you need to **know the hazard**, which means learning to recognize potential danger on the job and staying alert for it at all times. Finally, you need to **know the drill** – how do you handle hazards once you recognize them? Children at work should be taught to avoid hazards altogether, and to report them to a responsible adult immediately.

Training – who needs it?

Farms are getting larger and larger. The need for an extra pair of hands is greater than ever. In this situation, children easily and obviously become a source of support to get farm work done. But think about the increased complexity and technological advancements in farm machinery and production processes, and it's easy to see why training is so important. Most injuries among new farm workers occur due to a lack of knowledge or insufficient training. Don't let your children suffer the same fate. Provide them with proper instruction and time to practise before you send them out to do chores. **Know the job.**

- Allow children to prove they are capable of following the rules before giving them farm tasks to perform.
- Select chores that match the child's mental, physical and emotional capacity.
- Introduce complex tasks only when they are age-appropriate and with proper training (such as equipment operation – machinery is the most likely source of injury on the farm).
- Train children in the proper way to safely accomplish farm tasks before assigning chores. Provide personal protective equipment and ensure it is worn properly.
- Explain techniques that will make a task easier.
- Teach safety skills in ways that are appropriate to the child's age and abilities.
- Make age-appropriate rules. Enforce consequences consistently if they are not followed.
- Always supervise children according to their age – young children need constant supervision.

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Hazards

Children are vulnerable to the same hazards as adults, and there are many potential hazards on a farm – large machines, powerful tools, toxic chemicals, confining spaces, drowning hazards, animal threats and motor vehicles. However, children are less capable of understanding the danger. Childproofing is one strategy you can use to help keep children safe on the farm. Educating them about the hazards is another.

Studies suggest that children aged 10 to 14 are at greatest risk for farm-related injuries – this is the very age when children are most likely to get pushed beyond their developmental ability!

Parents often fail to recognize that behaviour appropriate to a child’s developmental stage will, by its very nature, put them at risk. (For example, a two-year-old is eager to explore his sensory world, and will do his best to retrieve a colourful bottle from a locked cabinet and taste its contents, even if he has been warned and even if it tastes terrible.) **Know the hazard.**

To prevent hazards from harming children:

- Learn the developmental characteristics of children at specific ages and use the information as a guide. Children are often drawn to dangerous situations. Inspect your farm from a child’s point of view for obvious hazards and remove them. Where hazards are built-in, explain the danger to children and supervise appropriately.
- Place hazardous chemicals, machinery and equipment in “off limit” areas and make sure children understand the need to stay away.
- Explain warning decals found on equipment, and teach children compliance.

Child development and chore selection

Age	Characteristics	Suggestions
0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to understand cause and effect • Illogical “magic” thinking • Fascinated by movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise carefully • Use physical barriers, i.e., locks and fences • Provide safe distractions • Prohibit riding on machinery
5-9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent use of logic • Wishes to seem competent • Wants adult approval • Unaware of realistic danger (kidnapping or war, rather than falling off of machinery) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide consistent rules • Discuss safe behaviour • Assign simple farm chores with careful supervision
10-13 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More physical, mental skills • Physical development often outstrips mental and emotional maturity • Wants social/peer approval • Wishes to practise new skills without constant supervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce consistent rules with consequences and rewards • Expose youth to machinery by letting them assist with maintenance • Talk to peers who’ve been hurt in farm incidents
13-16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to experiment • Strong need for peer acceptance • May resist adult authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce consistent rules • Begin tractor training, supervised use of tractors • Encourage safety projects through 4-H or other youth groups
16-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sense of adult responsibility, competence • Wants to be supportive, to do adult work • Need to take risks • Feelings of “immortality” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use clear, consistent rules regarding drugs and alcohol • Reward acceptance of adult responsibilities • Provide opportunity to be a role model in safety

Table Adapted from “Is Your Child Protected from Injury on the Farm?”
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Know the drill

To protect family members of all ages while working on the farm, teach them to **know the drill**. How will hazards be dealt with when they are encountered on the farm? As a parent, you set the tone for safety by setting an example. Show them that shortcuts are unacceptable, and that a slow, thorough approach to completing tasks is appropriate.

- Modify the rules for your farm to match the age and stage of each family member.
- Encourage children to get involved in farm safety projects in the community, either through youth groups or as a family.
- Teach children proper safety skills and be a role model in your daily work.
- Provide direction ahead of time about how to handle an emergency situation.
- Ensure all children know how to contact emergency services.
- Provide first aid training for at least some family members.
- Ensure children know the location of an accessible first aid kit and fire extinguisher. Provide instructions on using the fire extinguisher to older children.

Listen up!

Children doing chores are at the same risk of suffering hearing loss as adults. To prevent them from experiencing early damage, keep them away from loud machinery. Do not allow them in confined livestock areas, especially at times when animals are most likely to be loud. When loud noise simply cannot be avoided, provide children with well fitted hearing protection devices and ensure that they wear them.

Sun safety

Ensure children doing chores are protected against sun exposure. One serious childhood sunburn doubles the chances of developing skin cancer later in life. About 80% of skin cancer can be prevented by simply protecting the skin from the sun. Ensure shade is available, insist they wear clothing and a hat while doing chores, make sunscreen use mandatory, and provide UV-protective sunglasses.

Animal magnetism

Children love animals, but the reverse is not always true. For their own safety, children need to be taught

how to work around animals. For starters, keep livestock in pens or fenced areas. Then, teach children to:

- Respect all animals, including livestock and household pets.
- Be calm, move slowly and avoid loud noises around animals.
- Avoid animals with babies, and stay away from the back end of all animals.
- Approach large animals at the shoulder.
- Never handle stallions, bulls, rams and boars.
- Always have an escape route.

The last word

Growing up on the farm provides children with the opportunity to learn many valuable skills they would never be exposed to in an urban environment. With the right training and hazard awareness, they can grow into strong, confident farm workers you will be proud of. The key is to always ensure they have the skills and developmental ability to perform assigned chores. Protect your children from needless harm by taking time to know the job, know the hazard and know the drill.

To learn even more about assigning children safe and appropriate chores, see the North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks at www.nagcat.com, or order the CD *Farm Safety – It's No Accident* from Alberta Agriculture and Food by calling Cindy @ 1-780-427-4309.

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