

The Prevention Institute's Child Injury Prevention Program works to raise awareness of injury risks and best practices to reduce the number of injury-related hospitalizations and deaths in children, as well as decrease the risk of life-altering injury. Injuries remain a leading cause of death and disability for children in Canada. Saskatchewan has a particularly high rate of child injury. Taking preventative action is important for the health and well-being of all children.

1. What is injury? This helps us to identify what can be prevented. An injury is damage to the body. It may be visible (e.g., a cut) or invisible (e.g., a concussion). Injuries are caused when too much or too little energy is transferred to the body. When we talk about injury prevention most people think about safety. How can we keep our children and youth safe in this province? By understanding these injury prevention concepts and then taking action. Safety does not come automatically, it has to be role modelled and taught.

2. Injury Components

Cause, Intent, Location, Nature & Severity.

These concepts are found on page 8 & 9 in The Child Injury Prevention Programming and Action Guide at <https://skprevention.ca/resource-catalogue/safety/child-injury-prevention-programming-and-action-guide/>

3. The language we use when talking about injury. Particularly the word accident. Most injuries are caused by events that are predictable and preventable. Injuries are not accidents, inevitable, or part of our fate and destiny. The belief that we have no control over injuries is not true and can be used as an excuse not to take preventive action. Accidents are random, occur without warning and have no cause or explanation. Using the term "accident" suggests that nothing could have been done to prevent the injury. Often the word accident is referred to with car crashes. Before saying it was an accident, ask yourself, what could have been changed to decrease the chance or severity of injury? What happened before, during, and after the incident that may have affected the outcome of injury? Shifting our language to use the word preventable injuries can make a difference in how we view injuries.

4. Responsibility

Understanding this helps to understand the importance of promoting a culture of safety. Injury prevention and safety is the responsibility of individuals as well as society. Injury Prevention begins with you! Injury prevention matters. If we, our friends, or family are injured, it often becomes the most important focus in our lives. Bumps, bruises and scrapes may be a part of childhood, however serious injury, resulting in death or lifelong disability is something no child and no family should have to experience. When an injury to a child occurs, the magnitude of its impact is felt at all levels of society. Injuries also place an enormous burden on our health care system.

Together we can promote a safer community for all to live long healthy lives – free from serious injury. If we take responsibility seriously we will display safety behaviours and be role models. This will support a culture for our students. I believe this can be done early on in the schools and the earlier children learn about safe behaviours the more likely they will carry on. It is important to promote a culture of safety based on the evidence. The evidence is the number of children being seriously injured or those who have died from injury.

Use the report to address issues. <https://skprevention.ca/resource-catalogue/safety/child-and-youth-injury-in-saskatchewan-2004-2013-summary/>

In your school community use the numbers. Start early. Role model. As parents, teachers, community members we can each play a role. One way is to increase our understanding about how injuries occur, under what conditions they occur, who is at risk, and how injuries can be effectively prevented.

5. Hazard versus Risk

A hazard is a danger in the environment that could seriously injure a child and **is beyond the child's ability to recognize**. A risk is the challenge or uncertainty in the environment **that the child can recognize and learn to manage by setting her own limits and building her skills**.

When it comes to preventing injuries, it is important to think about the differences between hazards and risks. For example, a potential hazard would be a rotted tree branch that the child is unaware of and does not yet know how to identify. This hazard must be managed by the adult supervising. A risk would be climbing a healthy tree. This is a risk that can be managed by the child – he can decide how high to climb and can increase his skills over time to be able to climb higher.

<https://outsideplay.ca/> is a website by Dr. Marianna Brussoni and her team out of British Columbia which helps parents learn more about encouraging active play.

5 E's are effective ways to prevent injuries. Not one but work in combination.

Education (increasing the awareness and knowledge of injury prevention and best practices) It is important to educate as many individuals as possible including professionals, caregivers and children. Education can change not only our knowledge but our attitudes, belief, and behaviour (i.e. regularly checking and changing batteries in smoke detectors) Who can you educate? Where can you get good education? We can teach our children the rules of the road when riding a bike.

Engineering is the structure and design of an environment or of a particular device. Engineering includes the structure and design of a car seat or of a playground. It also includes the design of a school to make it safe for children or designing roadways with sidewalks.

Environment is what is around the child or person. What type of surface is on the playground? Is the hallway free of items that can be tripped on?

Enforcement is the implementation of particular rules and laws. Enforcement can mean bike helmet legislation or police enforcement of seat belt and car seat laws. Enforcement does not only mean police enforcement of laws however, but also parents enforcing rules in their home and with their children such as ensuring their children are always wearing a PFD in and near water and always wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle or skateboard.

Economic incentives can be helpful to enforcement. An example might be a fine for not using a child restraint properly.

Where do you fit in in your community or school when it comes to an injury topic?

What education pieces can you do? Who in your community is responsible for enforcement? What type of environment can schools set up?