

KITCHEN SAFETY

The majority of serious accidents that happen in the home occur in the kitchen. Here are some ways for you and your clients to stay safe in the kitchen:

- ☑ Make sure you understand how to use your client's kitchen equipment *before* turning it on.
- ☑ Keep appliances as clean as possible to prevent fire hazards. For example, empty the toaster oven's crumb tray and/or clean out the crumbs periodically from the toaster. Wipe out the microwave. Clean the stove top.
- ☑ Do not touch or handle electric equipment, including switches, if your hands are wet or if you are standing in water.
- ☑ Don't put metal in a microwave oven. The sparks can turn into fire or can seriously damage the microwave. And, if your client has a cardiac pacemaker, unplug the microwave and DO NOT use it!
- ☑ Unplug electric appliances when not in use. Otherwise, they continue to draw electricity even when they're not turned on. If the appliance's wiring is old or faulty, a fire could break out.
- ☑ If you take a hot pan off the stove and put it on a counter, leave a hot pad on top of the lid as a warning to your client that the pan is hot.
- ☑ Never leave wooden or plastic tools, dish towels, or other items on the stove top. If you turn on the wrong burner, you could easily melt something or start a fire.



- ☑ Make sure that all pot holders and kitchen dish cloths are at least a few inches away from the stove top, as they are quite flammable.
- ☑ Place the client's frequently used items at a convenient level—somewhere between the shoulders and the knees. This keeps the client from reaching and bending and reduces the chance of falls.
- ☑ Make sure that all cooking messes are cleaned up as they happen in order to prevent fires. Just a little bit of oil splattered on a stove top can ignite and turn into a major fire.

Encourage the client's family to keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen.

- ☑ Clean spills and messes off the floor immediately to prevent slipping and falling.
- ☑ If you are using a kitchen knife and you drop it, stand back and let it fall. Don't try to catch it! For most people, the instinct is to grab it—so ignore your instinct and avoid an injury!
- ☑ If glass gets broken, clean it up slowly and thoroughly. And, for safety's sake, suggest that your client dispose of any chipped or cracked items (such as glasses or plates) *before* they shatter or break.

What's the bottom line? In the kitchen, it's important to pay attention to what you are doing—whether it's cutting up food, cooking on the stove or using a mixer. Never leave these items unattended. If your client needs your attention, turn off the stove or other appliances before leaving the kitchen.

BED AND BATH SAFETY

Here are some tips for preventing accidents in the bedroom and bathroom:

- ☑ Keep a flashlight at the bedside table (in case of a power outage).
- ☑ Move a sturdy chair or table next to the bed that the client can use for support when getting in and out of bed. A sturdy chair with arms also helps with dressing and sitting.
- ☑ Consider moving the client's bed against one wall (to minimize the chances of the client tumbling out of bed).
- ☑ Keep in mind that some of your clients may find it safer and easier to dress while lying down—especially when it comes to pulling up pants. If a client is weak on one side, encourage him/her to dress the *weaker* side first.
- ☑ Encourage the family to purchase a room monitor (such as an inexpensive “baby monitor”) to alert them (and you) when the client needs help.
- ☑ Get rid of clutter. Clothing and towels on the floor invite accidents to happen. Cluttered shelves lead to things falling onto the floor—and perhaps hitting you or your client.
- ☑ NEVER plug in an electrical appliance near an area where water is present. This includes the bathtub, toilet—and even the sink. One false move could plunge a plugged-in electrical item into the water, causing electrocution.
- ☑ Remember that towel bars should not be used as grab rails! If your client is in need of grab bars in the bathroom, discuss the issue with the social worker.
- ☑ If the client's sink has a separate knob for hot water, consider marking it with red nail polish—to remind the client that the water will be hot.



- ☑ If possible, place a telephone near the toilet, to prevent the client from making a “run” for the phone.
- ☑ Encourage the family to remove any lock on the bathroom door so that, if the client should fall, the family can get in the room quickly.
- ☑ Get rid of all glass in the bathroom. Even decorative items such as candle holders or perfume bottles can fall and shatter, especially on a tile floor. You don't want anyone picking glass shards out of their feet.
- ☑ Keep an extra roll or two of toilet paper within easy reach at all times.

BATH TIME!

- ☑ Use nonslip safety strips or a nonslip bath mat in the tub or shower.
- ☑ Keep the tub clean to avoid slippery soap scum or mold.
- ☑ NEVER let your client use a soap dish, towel rack or sliding glass shower door for stability or balance. This is extremely unsafe because these items were not meant to support human weight.
- ☑ If the tub or shower floor is white—and your client is elderly—suggest that the family get a *colorful* non-slip rubber mat. Many seniors find it easier to judge distance with a colored mat against the white background.
- ☑ Remember that the greatest danger in a bathroom comes when clients get in and out of the tub or shower. The risk of falling is high! Be sure to wear rubber-soled shoes.

MISCELLANEOUS SAFETY TIPS

- ☑ Put some colored tape at eye level on glass doors or picture windows—especially for clients who are confused or suffering from dementia. This may keep them from trying to “walk through” the glass.
- ☑ Make sure that furniture will not move if your client leans on it for support.
- ☑ Discuss the furniture arrangement with the family. They may want to move any unnecessary furniture out of the way. To avoid confusion, once a client has gotten used to the new furniture arrangement, do not change it.
- ☑ Never run extension cords under carpets or where they may be stepped on. Extension cords should never be plugged together.
- ☑ Keep the floors free of clutter.

FACT: An 85-year-old needs three times as much light that a 15-year-old needs to see the same thing!

- ☑ Encourage the family to purchase an “automatic” night light that turns on when the room gets dark.
- ☑ Make sure that the client’s area is well lit, especially any hallways and stairways.
- ☑ Drain cleaners, bleaches and strong acids can be dangerous if mixed, causing explosions or dangerous gasses. Make sure to always use chemicals according to the directions on the package, and make sure that the containers are properly sealed when not in use.
- ☑ Wipe up any spills promptly to prevent falls.

HEATING PAD SAFETY:

Your clients may be in the habit of using a heating pad to relieve aches and pains. If so, keep these safety tips in mind:

- ☑ Inspect a heating pad before each use to see if it is in proper working order. If it looks worn or cracked or the electrical cord is frayed, don’t use it! Let the family know they should replace the heating pad.
- ☑ If the heating pad has a removable cover, keep it on during use.
- ☑ Don’t use pins or other metallic fasteners to hold a heating pad in place. (The metal can heat up and cause a burn.)
- ☑ Place a heating pad *on top of*—not underneath—the “target” body part. And, don’t let your clients sit on a heating pad. (The temperature of a heating pad increases if heat is trapped.)
- ☑ Unplug a heating pad when it is not being used.
- ☑ When storing a heating pad, don’t fold or crush it.
- ☑ Never use a heating pad on an infant, a client who is paralyzed or on someone whose skin is not sensitive to temperature changes.
- ☑ Advise your clients *not* to use a heating pad while they sleep.
- ☑ Make sure that clients who are on oxygen therapy don’t use heating pads. It’s a fire hazard!



KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE!

Did you know that Americans are 11 times safer *at work* than they are at home? However, because you work in clients' homes, it's up to you to help make your "workplace" safe. ***Here are some tips for staying safe as you make visits to clients' homes:***

- ☑ Get specific, clear directions to each client's home—before you leave your office.
- ☑ Make sure your supervisor knows your visit schedule. If your schedule changes for some reason, call the office right away.
- ☑ Park as close to the client's home as possible, preferably in a well lit area.
- ☑ Look around before you leave your car. Don't get out of the car if you feel unsafe.
- ☑ Be sure to lock your car. And, never leave your purse visible in your car. (Lock it in the trunk.)
- ☑ Attach a whistle or chemical spray to your key ring. Keep your keys ready—in your hand—while walking to and from your car.
- ☑ Always knock on the door before entering a client's home.
- ☑ Never enter a home that has not been *scheduled* for a visit. It's best to confirm the visit by phone ahead of time.
- ☑ Be careful in elevators. Stand close to the control panel with your back to the wall. If anyone bothers you, do not press the stop button. Instead, press the button for the next closest floor and get off as soon as the elevator stops. Knock on the first available apartment door. You can also try yelling, "***FIRE!***" and kicking the hallway walls.
- ☑ If you feel uncomfortable about someone who is waiting for the elevator with you, don't get on when the elevator door opens. Try saying, "***Go ahead. I'm waiting for a friend.***"
- ☑ In hallways, stick to the center of the space. If you need help, knock on as many doors as you can and yell, "***Fire!***".
- ☑ When you arrive at a client's home for the first time, take a minute to assess the situation. Do not enter a home if there is a visible threat to your safety such as drugs, weapons or unfriendly animals.
- ☑ Once inside, make a mental note of the location of every exit and of a telephone. As you perform your client care, keep an "exit strategy" in mind.
- ☑ If your client has relatives or neighbors who create a safety problem, discuss the issue with your supervisor.
- ☑ If anyone in the house, including the client, is intoxicated, abusive or making inappropriate advances toward you, end the visit right away. Call your supervisor from a safe place.
- ☑ If the client tells you to leave, end the visit and report the situation to your supervisor.
- ☑ If you are the victim of a robbery, don't resist giving up your money or valuables. They are not worth getting hurt over!
- ☑ Tell coworkers about any safety issues you've encountered at a specific client's home—in case they have visits scheduled with that client and/or in that neighborhood.
- ☑ If a client's home feels unsafe to you, ask your supervisor to send another aide with you or plan your visit to overlap with the visit of a nurse or therapist.



KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE, CONTINUED

WHAT ABOUT PETS?

- ☑ Don't assume that a client's pet will behave the same way every time you visit. Always proceed with caution around a client's animal.
- ☑ Remember that even a calm animal may become protective of its owner as you proceed with your work. Do not approach a dog or cat that has its hair raised or its teeth bared. These are signs that the animal feels threatened.
- ☑ In fact, your best bet is not to touch your client's animals at all. This reduces your chances of being bitten and keeps you from having to rewash your hands in the middle of client care.
- ☑ Your clients probably love their pets and may want you to show affection to them as well. Explain that your workplace has a policy requiring you to keep your distance from all animals.
- ☑ If you feel uncomfortable around a client's pet, ask the family to put the animal in another room or restrain it during your visit.
- ☑ If a dog starts dashing toward you, don't run. The dog's instinct is to chase after you—even if it doesn't want to hurt you.
- ☑ If a dog approaches you, try to stand very still for a minute or two. The dog will probably sniff you (to check you out) and then get bored and walk away.
- ☑ Avoid making eye contact with a dog as this is seen as an aggressive move. And, if you walk away from a strange dog, go very slowly and calmly.
- ☑ If you are bitten by a client's pet, wash the wound gently with soap and water. Then, call your supervisor for further instructions.



- ☑ Avoid handling dog treats in your client's home. Some treats may be contaminated with salmonella, a bacteria that can cause food poisoning.
- ☑ Keep a bottle of flea spray in your car, especially during the fall. If you suspect that you have been in a home where there are fleas, spray your lower legs and feet when you leave the house.



GET creative!

Tap into your experience on the job and come up with at least ONE creative solution to each of the three problems listed on this page:

You are uncomfortable in a client's neighborhood after dark (and it's getting dark early): _____

Your client doesn't have a telephone and you don't have a cell phone. In an emergency, you would: _____

Your client's son tells you that he has several guns in his room: _____
