

TIP SHEET

Children on a Farm



Farms can be a fun place for children. It can also be a dangerous place. Children who live on a family farm range in age and needs. Other children also come to visit or attend child care offered at the site. Children are enchanted by the animals, the equipment and the activity that comes with the cycles of nature.

There is much to learn about farm safety, even before children are taken into consideration. Many farm safety resources are available online and through your local office of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The Farm Safety Association is based in Guelph, Ontario and has a website which also includes a section Just for Kids.

Parents & children both need to know about playing safe on a farm. Here are some guidelines:

1. Create safe, accessible play areas, designed just for children

Every child deserves a safe place to play. It is a parent's responsibility to create "hazard-free" play areas to protect their children. A farm cannot be considered a giant playground. View your farm from your child's perspective. Get down on their level and look up, down and all around. Search the internet, local library or ask trained child care staff for child development guidelines (ages and stages). You may also have information from physical (PT) and occupational (OT) specialists about your child's strengths & needs. These help to identify risks on the farm.

Boundaries and limits need to be set for play areas. A fenced play area is a great place to start for young children. Check online for laws and local regulations for creating safe play areas on a farm. There may be grant money available to fund the building of a safe, accessible play area on your farm. It's worth the time to ask around.

Change the play opportunities and equipment as children grow and develop. Very young children cannot understand the concept of rules but as they grow they begin to understand the reasons for rules and the consequences for not following them. Bike helmets should NOT be worn when playing on playgrounds. Children have become entrapped or strangled from slipping or crawling into small openings.

2. Stay away from machinery and vehicle movement

The small size of children compared to the large size of farm equipment is a big concern. It is very difficult for drivers & operators to see children under or around machinery. Never take extra riders on tractors, machines or the drawbar of wagons. Passengers MUST have a proper seat. The potential for injury and death is too great!

As a safety precaution, always remove keys from motorized equipment to prevent starting by children. Some equipment have a button start-up. Can the power be locked out so that mechanisms cannot start by accident?

3. Limit access to hazardous materials

Make sure children do not have any access to dangerous materials and chemicals. Farms use potentially toxic pesticides and chemicals. Secure the entrances to silos and grain bins to prevent children from getting inside.

Dust from organic sources such as hair, bedding, grain and dried urine and feces are dangerous. When airborne, dust & mold can be easily inhaled by children playing nearby. Some dust and spores can cause immediate and long term breathing problems. Play areas must be located away from sources of organic dust.

After playing outside in the city or on the farm, be sure to wash hands to reduce the chance of infection.

4. Reduce exposure to higher noise levels

Farms have many sources of loud noise such as tractors, compressors, grain dryers, chain saws and noisy livestock/ animals. Being exposed to loud noise is the most common cause of hearing loss. The loudness (decibel level) and the length of exposure both contribute to permanent hearing loss. Workers should be wearing protective ear-wear, but we must also think about children who have their play area outside. You may need to change the time for outside play to work around the extra noise. Protect everyone's hearing, starting at birth.

5. Supervise children at all times

Supervision is needed at all ages. Even with a fence, supervision is still a must. Young children simply cannot be left alone and need constant supervision. When both parents are working, find someone else—a babysitter, a relative, or a rural day care service—to care for the children. Situations may arise on short notice when no one else is available. When both parents are needed in the barn, create a safe spot with a few toys where you can still see & hear the children. This safe spot could be a child's playpen or a clean, empty calf pen.

The level of supervision will change as the age and development of the child changes. More supervision will be necessary when children have a larger play space, the numbers of children increase and when farm activity increases, during busy planting and harvest times.

When older children begin helping on the farm, a different kind of supervision is needed. A child's maturity level is important and affects the level of supervision needed. Children must prove they are capable of following the farm rules before they are allowed to perform farm tasks.

Tasks that tend to be appropriate for children include:

- Preschool: household clean up, watering plants, feeding small animals.
- Age 6-11: hand tools are appropriate- not power tools, feeding animals (under supervision), weeding, watering and picking; hand raking and digging.
- Ages 12-14: limited power tools under supervision.
- Age 15-18: can start to do adult jobs under supervision.

There are appropriate times of the day for children to observe and learn by example. Helping with chores is a great time to include children while limiting exposure to machinery and dangers.

6. Adaptive equipment and resources for inclusion

Depending on the needs of your child or a child in your care, specialized adaptive equipment may be required. The needs may relate to feeding, walking, mobility, playing and/ or sleeping. The equipment would be recommended by a therapist to support and include the child in the home or child care setting. Ask a professional what resources are available in your area.

The Thames Valley Children's Centre website has information about adaptive equipment for children. www.tvcc.on.ca/, search for 'adaptive equipment'.

Another good resource for the London area is the Calendar of Support for Families of Children with Special Needs: www.thehealthline.ca

Information for services in your area: www.211.ca

Canadian Rural Information Service: www.rural.gc.ca/ or phone: 1-888-757-8725 connect with the Rural Child Care Pathfinder

Children learn best from watching their parent's example. Children often repeat the actions that they see. Farmers and their workers should always consider the safe choices when working. Setting a good example can make a life or death difference. Set a good example for your own safety and as a role model for children.

Search the internet for Children's Interactive Games & Activity Sheets on Farm Safety. You'll be pleasantly surprised at what you find.

Safety always comes first! below is a simple list of farm safety rules to use with your children:

Preschooler's Farm Safety Rules

Ask First! Before you touch.

Stay in your safe play area - the farmyard is not a playground.

If there is only **One Seat** – there is only **One Rider!**

Never go near water, machines or animals without an adult.

Information sources for this tip sheet include:

Creating Safe Play Areas on Farms by Esser, N., Heiberger, S. and Lee, B. of the Marshfield Clinic, WI / The Safety of Children on the Farm by the Canada Safety Council / Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives website / Safety of Children in Agriculture by the Farm Safety Association