

# **Unique Safety Concerns when Children Share Homes with Elders**

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# The Problem

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- Prevalence data
- Common safety needs/devices/concerns
- Opposing Issues
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of understanding
- Limited preparation time
- Forgetfulness/senior moments

# Prevalence

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- “Sandwich Generation”
- The number of people living with several generations under one roof in the United States is at its highest point in 50 years
- 49 million Americans – 16.1 % of the population live in homes with multiple generations

Pew Research Center Report

# Prevalence

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- “Grandfamilies”
- The number of children who lived with their grandparents had been slowly rising over the last decade with a sharp increase from 2007 to 2008
- More than 4.5 million minors live with a grandparent
  - Of those, 2.4 million are being raised primarily by grandparents

Pew Research Center Report and U.S. Census Bureau

# Common Safety Needs

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Children and older adults share many of the same health and safety risks in the home.

Some safety devices provide a common benefit to both groups.

- ◉ Anti slip rug tape
- ◉ Anti scald device
- ◉ Window locks

# Opposing Issues

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Addressing dexterity and accessibility issues with older adults may pose a threat to children.

- ◉ Ease of access can be hazardous: cleaning supplies, medication, stairs
- ◉ Assistive devices may pose threats: toilet seat risers, taller toilets

# Opposing Issues continued

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Addressing safety hazards for children may create a barrier to accessibility for older adults.

- Outlet covers
- Doorknob covers
- Baby gates

# Lack of Understanding

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- “I did it all the time and look at me” or “That’s how I did it with my kids”
  - Sleeping locations
  - Car seats
  - Food choking hazards

I am one of the baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964. I sometimes wonder how we survived our childhoods. Consider:

Our mothers smoked and/or drank while pregnant.

They took aspirin, ate blue cheese dressing, tuna from a can and didn't get tested for diabetes.

Then after that trauma, we were put to sleep on our tummies in baby cribs covered with brightly colored, lead-based paints.

There were no childproof lids on medicine or special locks on cabinet doors.

We rode bikes, we wore baseball caps, not specially engineered helmets.

As infants, we rode in cars without car seats or booster seats, no seat belts and no air bags. Sometimes, as tots, we rode in small moving boxes packed with blankets and toys.

We rode in the back of pickup trucks and no one was arrested or cited.

We drank water from garden hoses, not from plastic bottles.

We shared a single bottle of Coca-Cola with three friends — and no one died.

We ate cupcakes with food coloring, white bread, real butter and bacon.

In fact, we drank Kool-Aid mixed with tablespoons of real sugar.

Excerpt written by Doug Ross

# Lack of Knowledge

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Hazards and recommendations change.

- ◉ Recalled products
- ◉ Sleeping positions

# Limited Preparation Time

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- ◉ Unexpected arrival
- ◉ No time to learn about hazards
- ◉ No time to prepare or childproof home
- ◉ Sleeping areas may be limited

# Forgetfulness

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- ⦿ Failure to refasten gates
- ⦿ Leaving medication within reach
- ⦿ Forgetting to secure hazardous substances

# Addressing Concerns

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## ○ Education

- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Educational Program
  - A coalition including the AARP, University of Wisconsin Extension Services, and the Purdue Research Foundation
  - Three session educational program for grandparents raising grandchildren. e-mail to [mhollidge@aarp.org](mailto:mhollidge@aarp.org) for more information
- Response to Doug by James Joyner  
<http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/are-we-overprotecting-our-kids/>

The cost of the more carefree existence of that bygone age was more than some cuts, bruises, and chipped teeth. More kids died, were permanently maimed and paralyzed, and had birth defects when Doug and I were growing up than now.

It's true that women routinely smoked and consumed alcohol while pregnant. My mother did both and I turned out fine! But that doesn't mean there's no risk. The [American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) ("**Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs, and Pregnancy**"):

If a woman smokes when she is pregnant, her baby is exposed to harmful chemicals... Nicotine causes blood vessels to constrict, so less oxygen and nutrients reach the fetus. Carbon monoxide lowers the amount of oxygen the baby receives. Alcohol increases the chance of having a miscarriage or a preterm baby. Heavy drinking during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol syndrome.

Similarly, I didn't ride in a car seat, much less a booster seat.

And I rode in the front seat from a very early age when just one parent was in the car. And I emerged unscathed! Does that mean car seats are a bad idea? Some statistics from the National Highway Transportation Safety Agency ("**Traffic Safety Facts – 2008 Data**" [PDF](#)):

Among passenger vehicle occupants over age 4, seat belts saved an estimated 13,250 lives in 2008. If all passenger vehicle occupants over age 4 had worn seat belts, 17,402 lives (that is an additional 4,152) could have been saved in 2008.

Research on the effectiveness of child safety seats has found them to reduce fatal injury by 71 percent for infants (younger than 1 year old) and by 54 percent for toddlers (1 to 4 years old) in passenger cars

From 1975 through 2008, an estimated 8,959 lives were saved by child restraints (child safety seats or adult seat belts).

# Addressing Concerns

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## ○ Resources

### • Support Groups

- AARP Grandparent Information Center
  - [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)
  - phone 202-434-2296
- Generations United [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org)
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
- GAP (Grandparents As Parents)
- ROCKing (Raising Our Children's Kids)
- [www.recalls.gov](http://www.recalls.gov)

## ○ Tools

- Childproofing devices that older adults can manage

