

Empowering families to change

Parents can feel overwhelmed by the ever-mounting pressure of demands for their time and attention. Motivating parents to make changes to improve child safety and empowering them to sustain those changes can be challenging for practitioners working with families.

So what helps parents incorporate changes into their daily lives?

 **Anticipate problems** – many accidents happen when parents are taken by surprise by the next stage of their child’s development, whether that’s a baby grabbing their mug of coffee or a small child copying what they do. So the first step is helping parents make the link between childhood accidents and child development, so they can anticipate problems and stay one step ahead.

 **Build confidence** – some parents may lack confidence in their ability to change things. You can help to build their sense of control, so they realise that they can identify problems and then make choices that help keep their children safe. It helps to keep your language non-judgemental. For the one parent in six who struggles to read, think about how you can support them to work out safe options and make safe choices about everyday routines.

 **Identify goals** – ask families to be specific about the change they are going to make. Then help them to plan and visualise what they will do, thinking through when they can do it, how long it will take and any barriers that might get in the way. Ask them to commit to a time: “on Wednesday when my mum has the kids, I’ll sort out the cleaning things under the sink and move them into the cupboard.” When you next see them, ask them how they got on.

 **Keep it small and simple** – keeping a child safe from serious accidents can seem overwhelming and demotivating for some parents. So breaking the issue down into manageable nuggets of advice, like *“Find a safe place in the kitchen where you always put your hot drink down”* given in context in a conversation will help parents feel empowered to make changes.

 **Share experiences** – sharing experiences can be really motivating. Hearing about familiar problems from other parents and how they found solutions means parents can build their knowledge of child safety and see that they too have the skills to be effective and that they are not alone. Group discussions or social media can be enormously supportive and, by sharing, parents reinforce their own sense of efficacy. Why not share CAPT’s Facebook posts with the parents you work with (www.facebook.com/childaccidentpreventiontrust).

 **Repetition leads to habits** – small changes repeated often enough become automatic habits – this is a really important point to emphasise to parents who already feel under pressure. If families get into habits such as shutting the safety gate each time, or always using the five point harness on the high chair, they soon become automatic, and safety has become part of everyday life. Ask parents to share their tips on how they learn new habits.