Safe Farm: Match age, abilities to farm chores

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However, it can offer some general guidelines for adults to use when providing careful supervision, assigning chores, and teaching about safety in ways that are appropriate for the youth’s age and abilities.

Developmental stages
As all children grow, they pass through a series of developmental stages. Physical changes are obvious, as a child grows taller and stronger. Mental and emotional changes are difficult to detect unless adults understand characteristics of each stage.

Most injuries occur when a child is doing something that is beyond his or her mental, physical, or emotional ability. For example, two-year-olds may be barely able to talk but are active learners eager to explore their sensory world. If they see someone hide a colorful bottle in a cabinet, they will do their best to get at it, open the bottle and taste its contents; even if they have been warned and even if it tastes terrible.

Preschool children are not developmentally ready to understand cause and effect relationships. They need physical barriers such as fences, gates and locks, to keep them away from danger.

On the other hand, teen-aged youth are mentally equipped to understand that risky behavior often has unpleasant consequences. However, they often are driven to ignore common sense to satisfy the emotional need for experimentation or excitement, typical of that age.

A 16-year-old who drives her father’s truck too fast on a gravel road probably knows the speed limit. She probably remembers her parents’ warnings. But she’s speeding because she wants to, perhaps to provide thrills for lack of anything else to do.
Parents of teen-aged youth must acknowledge their psychological needs and provide safe challenges such as sports, activities with other youth their age, and new experiences.

On this page is a chart with common characteristics of youth at different stages. Typical risks on Iowa farms are listed, plus suggestions for action.

Farm youth spend most of their waking hours in one of the nation’s most dangerous workplaces, agriculture. They routinely encounter hazards in farm chores. They must know what to do during busy seasons when adult family members may be preoccupied with other tasks. By understanding the stages of a child’s growth and development, adults can help protect farm youth from needless harm.

Prepared by Charles V. Schwab, ISU Extension safety specialist; John Shutske, Minnesota Extension safety specialist; and Laura Miller, Safe Farm editor. Design by Valerie King.

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<th>Ages and stages</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Cause of most farm injuries</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Toddler/preschool (0-5 years)</td>
<td>Unable to understand cause and effect</td>
<td>Slips and falls, Machinery, Animals</td>
<td>Supervise carefully, Use physical barriers, i.e. locks and fences, Provide safe distractions, Prohibit riding on machinery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early school (5-9 years)</td>
<td>Inconsistent use of logic, Wishes to seem competent, Wants adult approval, Unaware of realistic danger (kidnapping or war rather than falling off machinery)</td>
<td>Slips and falls, Machinery, Being struck by an object</td>
<td>Provide consistent rules, Discuss safe behavior, Assign simple farm chores with careful supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older school (10-13 years)</td>
<td>More physical, mental skills, Physical development often outstrips mental, emotional maturity, Wants social, peer approval, Wishes to practice new skills without constant eye</td>
<td>Animals, Machinery, Recreational vehicles (ATVs, bikes)</td>
<td>Enforce consistent rules with consequences and rewards, Expose youth to machinery by letting them “help” you with maintenance, Talk to peers who’ve been hurt in farm accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (13-16 years)</td>
<td>Desires to experiment, Strong need for peer acceptance, May resist adult authority</td>
<td>Animals, Machinery, Power tools, Slips and falls</td>
<td>Enforce consistent rules, Begin tractor training, supervised use of tractors, Encourage safety projects in 4-H, FFA, other groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adult (16-18 years)</td>
<td>Increased sense of adult responsibility, competence, Desires to be supportive, to do adult work, Needs to take risks, Feelings of “immortality”</td>
<td>Animals, Machinery, Power tools, Slips and falls</td>
<td>Use clear, consistent rules regarding drugs, alcohol, Reward acceptance of adult responsibilities, Provide opportunity to be a role model in safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted with permission from Is Your Child Protected from Injury on the Farm?, copyrighted by the Minnesota Extension Service, 1993, AG-FO-6068B. Causes of injuries based on 1992 data from the Iowa Department of Public Health.

For more information

- To learn more about farm safety, check out these Safe Farm publications that highlight youth: Extra Riders Mean Extra Dangers, Pm-1518c, and Review Family Farm Safety Rules, Pm-1265g.
- Your local extension office also has information about 4-H and youth safety programs, including the Safety Project Guide, 4H-692-MP.
- Another resource is a reprint of a special section, “We Kill Too Many Farm Kids,” that appeared in Successful Farming. To order, call Farm Safety 4 Just Kids at 1-800-423-5437. Cost item.


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Check the World Wide Web at: http://www.ae.iastate.edu/safety.htm for more information.

Safe Farm: is an Iowa State University Extension project helping to make Iowa farms a safer place to work and live.

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