

Teaching your children how to use 911

Teaching your children how to use 911 is crucial and could save their lives or yours. Here are four simple steps for teaching your children, no matter how old they are, how to use 911:

1. First explain what 911 is.
2. Teach them to assess the risks before dialing 911.
3. Explain what type of information to give once they have called 911.
4. Practice scenarios with them to make them more familiar with the concept without frightening them.

To find out more about how to prepare for a wide range of emergencies, go to www.GetPrepared.gc.ca.

1) Explain what 911 is

First, children should be taught when to call 911. Let them know that they can call this service at any time if they think that one or more people are in danger or are seriously injured. Assessing this kind of situation may not be obvious to children, so they need concrete examples. If your children are young, use simple words and avoid medical terms. For example, you could say: "If you see someone lying on the ground not moving, find an adult immediately. If no one is around, call 911."

If someone close to you has a particular health problem, you should explain it to your children. Describe the symptoms and tell them what to do in case this person is not feeling well.

2) Assess the risks before calling 911

Next, your children must be able to determine whether or not it is safe to call 911 from where they are. Remind them that they must be somewhere safe before calling 911. For example, tell them that if there is fire in a room or throughout the house, they are to leave the house immediately and then call 911. Remember: Calling 911 from a payphone is free.

Explain to your children that calling 911 is not a game or a joke. Tell them that every second counts when someone is in danger. An unnecessary 911 call could prevent someone who is truly in danger from getting help.

3) What to say to 911

Finally, explain to your children what will happen when they call 911. Tell them that someone (a man or a woman) will ask them whether they need police, fire or an ambulance. Again, if your children are young, use words that are easy to understand (such as "ambulance" instead of "paramedic"). If your children are very young, briefly explain what each service can do in emergencies or instruct them to tell the person on the line that they need help right away.

Teach them that they are then to describe the situation and say where they are.

The location of the emergency is always asked first, then the name, location and phone number of the caller.

It is important to be as accurate and as clear as possible.

4) Practice / role-play

Familiarize children with emergency situations to help reduce panic or anxiety in case of a real emergency.

For example, you can create a game with scenarios for your children to test their knowledge. Adapt scenarios accordingly to your children's age and development. Practice several times a year so that your children are as prepared as possible to deal with emergencies.

Below are three basic scenarios you can use with your children. The answers are provided in brackets.

Scenario #1

- You're playing in the living room when you hear a loud noise from the kitchen. You go to see what's happening and see mom on the floor. What should you do?
(*Check to see if mom can hear me.*)
- Mom answers you, then tries to get up but can't. She is bleeding a lot. Should you call 911?
(*Yes, I have to call 911 and ask for an ambulance.*)
- What do you have to tell 911?
(*The Emergency is at 123 X street, X city. My mom fell down, she can still talk but she's bleeding a lot and can't get up. I am calling from 123 X Street, X City. This is also where we live.*)
- Can you wait for the ambulance with your mom?
(*Yes. I'm not in any danger.*)

Scenario #2

- You come home from school and see that the door to your house is broken, and you think someone you don't know may be inside. What should you do?
(*Go to my neighbours' house or use a payphone for free and ask to call 911.*)
- You come home from school and see that the door to your house is broken, and you think someone you don't know may be inside. What should you tell 911?
(*Location of the emergency is 123 X street, X city. Someone I don't know broke down the door to my house and might be inside. I need the police. I am at 123 X Street, X City, my neighbours' house and I'm safe.*)
- Can you wait for the police?
(*Yes, but I have to stay at the neighbours', I can't go home to wait for the police.*)

Scenario #3

- You're playing outside with your older sister and she falls off her bicycle. What should you do?
(*Check to see if she can hear me.*)
- She answers you but says her knee hurts a little. Her knee is bleeding a little bit. Should you call an ambulance?
(*No, this isn't a serious injury and she is conscious.*)
- What should you do?
(*Go home to clean the injury or go get help from an adult I know.*)