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Parenting the Preschooler

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Secondhand Smoke

What Is Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is a mixture of:

- smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, pipe or cigar, and
- smoke exhaled from the lungs of smokers

Secondhand smoke contains many harmful chemicals.

Secondhand smoke is also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS); exposure to secondhand smoke is called involuntary smoking, or passive smoking.

According to the American Lung Association, it is not easy to avoid secondhand smoke. About one in four people smoke. Over half of children under five years of age live in homes with at least one adult smoker.

Secondhand Smoke Especially Hurts Children

Children are especially susceptible to secondhand smoke. Their lungs are still developing. The American Lung Association cites these risks for children.

- ▶ Secondhand smoke causes decreased lung function, increasing the risk of developing asthma.
- ▶ Babies whose caregivers and parents smoke are seven times more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

- ▶ Children exposed to secondhand smoke have more asthma attacks, sinus and ear infections, allergies, bronchitis, pneumonia, and croup.
- ▶ Those children whose parents smoke have up to twice the risk of getting lung cancer when they become adults.

Secondhand Smoke in Your Home

We spend more time in our homes than anywhere else. So the thought of cancer-causing chemicals circulating throughout our homes can be quite unsettling. Yet, that is exactly what happens when someone lights a cigarette in your home.

Ventilation systems in homes cannot filter and circulate air well enough to eliminate secondhand smoke. Opening a window may help reduce children's exposure but will not protect them from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

How Can You Protect Yourself and Your Family?

Here are some ways to protect yourself and your family from secondhand smoke:

- ▶ Don't smoke in your home.
- ▶ Ask other people not to smoke in your home, especially baby-sitters or others who may care for your children. Have gum or mints available as an alternative.

- ▶ People often don't realize how dangerous secondhand smoke is for children. Try saying:
"My child's asthma and allergies are really affected by smoke."

- "The smoke is very bad for my child's health."*

- "We're concerned that if we smoke in front of the kids, they will think that it's cool and do the same thing."*

- ▶ Ask smokers to go outside while they smoke, away from where your children play.

- ▶ If someone must smoke inside, limit them to rooms where windows can be opened or fans can be used to send the smoke outside.

- ▶ Help people who are trying to quit smoking. Refer them to your local Public Health Department for information and assistance to stop smoking.

Benefits of a Smoke-Free Home

The greatest benefit, of course, is that you will remove all the health risks associated with secondhand tobacco smoke. Plus:

- ▶ When your home is smoke-free it will smell much better.

- ▶ Your food will taste better.

- ▶ You'll spend less time, energy, and money cleaning your curtains, walls, windows, and mirrors.

- ▶ Your insurance rates may be lower - check with your insurance company.

- ▶ Even your pets will be happier. For example, secondhand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer in dogs.

What Can You Do To Protect Yourself and Your Family Outside of Your Home?

- ▶ Let family, friends and people you work with know that you **do** care if they smoke around you and your children.

- ▶ Do not allow smoking in your car.

- ▶ Avoid public places where people smoke. Choose smoke-free restaurants.

- ▶ Make sure your child's day-care is smoke-free.

Sources:

American Lung Association. 1998.
 Secondhand Smoke. Connecticut Clearinghouse, Wheeler Clinic, Inc. 1996.
 Secondhand Smoke: How to Protect Your Kids. Journeyworks Publishing. 1998.

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