

# Parent pages



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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## Sun Sizzle is not Sun Safety

**T**he change in the ozone layer has made for a change in our exposure to the harmful parts of the sun's rays. Our ancestors of several generations back had daily exposure to copious amounts of the sun, yet ours is the generation with a greater risk of skin cancer.

The risk for our children is even greater than for us. Just like parents—who never rode in a car seat when they were young—learned to strap children into safety seats, those of us who didn't bother with sunscreen when we were little will need to learn to teach and model better sun safety behaviors for our children. Children experience more than half their total life's sun exposure by age 18.

This childhood sun exposure is what will put them at risk for skin damage or cancer. Now is the time to instill good habits.

Common sense does not always prevail when it comes to sun safety. Here are some common sun safety myths that do not hold up in the light of day:

■ **We do not need to worry about sunburn on a cool or cloudy day.**

Clouds and cool weather do not filter

UV rays. The danger for sunburn may actually be stronger under these circumstances, as the coolness of the air keeps a child from feeling the heat of sunburn.

■ **Sun damage does not happen during the winter months.**

While we do not need sunscreen under our snowsuits, the rays of the winter sun are just as damaging to our eyes and any exposed skin. We need sun protection year-round.

■ **We should use sunscreen at the pool but we do not need to worry about short periods of backyard play.**

Most damage is attributed to short amounts of daily exposure. Sun protection procedures are recommended any time you are exposed to the sun.

■ **Darker skin color and sun tans offer the protection we need.**

While darker skin color provides some protection, this is only equivalent to sunscreen with a very low SPF

factor. Any skin can burn. Also, a sun tan is only evidence of sun damage. It does not provide UV protection or prevent further damage.

In order to build up safety habits that



stand up to the strong rays of the sun, let's examine the ABC's of sun safety:

**A is for avoid.**

Avoid the strongest rays of the day by limiting sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

**B is for babies.**

Babies have skin that is very sensitive and are even more vulnerable to sun damage. Babies younger than 6 months are too young for the safe use of sunscreen

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and should be protected from the sun in other ways.

### **C is for cover-up.**

In addition to sun screen, clothes offer another avenue of defense. Clothes that are opaque (you can't see your hand through them) will offer another layer of protection.

### **D is for Doctor.**

Take your child to see a physician if a sunburn causes blisters. Some medications can put your child at greater risk of sun damage. Check with your child's doctor or your pharmacist for information regarding medications.

### **E is for effectiveness.**

Sunglasses need to provide 100 percent UV protection. Sunglass that are not marked in this way will only keep your child's eyes from any natural protection eyes can provide by stopping your child from squinting.

For sunscreen, you need to make sure you have protection from both UVB and UVA rays. An SPF factor of 15 is good, but 30 is better because it will give protection if not enough sunscreen is used. Be sure to reapply every two to three hours.

### **F is for find shade.**

Look for tree shade when picnicking or playing on a playground. If your backyard does not have shade, consider a shade tent. Avoid putting sandboxes or playground sets in areas of the yard that receive little shade.

### **G is for glasses.**

Our eyes need protection, too. The skin around our eyes is sensitive and vulnerable to damage but sun exposure can cause damage to the eyes as well. Sunglasses can protect against future cataracts and other eye diseases.

### **H is for hats.**

Hats with brims that provide protection for the face and neck should be part

of an everyday outside fashion statement.

### **I is for immune system.**

Severe sunburns can affect your child's immune system, putting him or her at risk for other infections. If your child gets sunburn, avoid the sun entirely until it has healed. Use cool (not cold) baths to offer comfort from pain and aloe vera gel to promote healing.

### **J is for just do it!**

Store sun protection items such as hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen by the door to remind everyone to use them. Make application of sunscreen part of the daily routine.

The sun shines every day, whether we see it or not. In order to teach these habits to our children, we need to follow them all the time, whether or not they are watching. The best way we teach our children to do something is to model that behavior.

God has provided us with information about how to stay safe and healthy. Following that advice on a regular basis is not always easy. In Paul's letter to Titus giving advice on how to work with the church at Crete, he reminds Titus about the importance of modeling behaviors:

"Similarly encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything, set them an example by doing what is good." **Titus 2:6**

Titus had a tough job encouraging a church to travel a different behavior road than the community in which it lived and worked. You may think you have a losing battle in getting your children to change habits, to wear hats and sunglasses if they do not see their friends doing it. Whether

they admit it or not, your children look to *you* first when choosing habits. You will have a big influence on their behavior through your modeling.

Just as the sun shines everywhere, sun safety should be a part of every part of your child's day. Check with your child's school or child care center to see if they have a policy regarding sun safety. Be a good influence to encourage change.

The Web sites listed under "For Further Study" can be used by parents, teachers, and administrators to examine sun safety routines and help them become policies as well as daily routines. Safe "fun in the sun" is possible and to be encouraged.



## **For Discussion:**

- Can you think of safety measures your parents taught you that they were not taught by their parents?
- What other things do you teach and model for your children that were not a concern for you growing up?
- Can you think of examples of when your words or actions showed up in your child's behavior?

## **For Further Study:**

- An article for parents and teachers: [www.skincancer.org/content/view/202/](http://www.skincancer.org/content/view/202/)
- Activities for children: [www.nsc.org/ehc/kidscorn.htm](http://www.nsc.org/ehc/kidscorn.htm)
- For schools and child care centers; [www.epa.gov/sunwise/doc/brochure.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/doc/brochure.pdf)