

# Age Appropriate Activities for Children

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Most people would not allow their children to wander about unsupervised in a factory or construction site. Precaution in these areas seems natural and the government has enacted laws to keep children from working in these areas. At the same time, many people believe growing up and working on a farm is an ideal situation for children because of the fresh air, responsibility and a feeling of community. And most of the time, it is.

Yet every year, an estimated 100,000 children suffer preventable injuries on farms and ranches. Children account for 20 percent of all farm fatalities.

What's killing and maiming these children? Tractors, farm machinery, livestock, building structures, and falls are the main culprits. In many cases, children are doing grown-up work with grown-up equipment before they are mentally and physically prepared to do so.

All children grow and mature at different rates, but the following information can be used as a guideline for appropriate activities for different age levels.

**5 and Under...** Children five and under don't understand cause and effect, are intrigued by moving parts and love to imitate adults and be near their parents. They also have short-term memories. *Common Hazards* – Falls from farm equipment, drowning, and consuming poisons. *Prevention* – Close supervision and good planning. Keep chemicals out of reach, with child proof lids. Keep children fenced out of dangerous areas and don't give into requests for a ride on equipment. *Appropriate Chores* – Pulling weeds or scattering feed for chickens (while under supervision).

**5 to 9...** Children between 5 and 9 want parental approval and want to show they are "grown up" by taking on more tasks. They often resist advice and want to prove they can do "it" by themselves without listening fully to directions. This group gets bored with an activity quickly. Poor hand/eye coordination and over confidence is their own abilities lead to injuries. *Common Hazards* – Farm machinery and livestock. *Prevention* – Never allow children of any age (or adults, for that matter) to be extra riders on farm tractors or play near gravity wagons or grain bins. Avoid just saying, "No," when they want to do something. Give them a short explanation and practice what you teach. Supervision is still necessary for this age group. *Appropriate Chores*

– Cleaning out empty pens, putting feed in feed bins (when animals are on the other side of the fence), and yard work such as digging, raking and weeding are appropriate. Some children may also be able to handle simple hand tools. Resist the temptation to allow children to do other chores just because you did them when you were their age.

**9-12...** Children between the ages of 9 and 12 want to fit in with their peers and don't want constant supervision. *Common Hazards* – Bicycle accidents, operating machinery and falls. *Prevention* – Parents need to assess each of their children individually and decide if they are mature enough for the chores they are assigned. Make safety a priority when training them. *Appropriate Chores* – Mowing the yard is a good task for children 10 and over. Working with power tools, livestock and properly guarded farm machinery should only be performed by older children in this age group and only while under adult supervision. Reward children for using safe behavior and enforce consequences when they don't.

**12 to 15...** This group feels immortal and wants to do things their way. *Common Hazards* – Machinery rollovers and hearing loss. They are physically able to do many chores, but don't always concentrate on what they are doing and exceed their limits. *Prevention* – Make sure all equipment is properly maintained and all guards and shields are in place. Safety training is important and make sure safety equipment such as earplugs and protective eye wear are available. *Appropriate Chores* – Working with power tools, livestock and properly guarded farm equipment are acceptable as long as they are supervised.

**15 to 18...** The feeling of immortality exists in this age group, too. Competition with others can lead to injuries. This group is in a hurry – to finish so they can study, go out, or participate in sports or other extra curricular activities. *Common Hazards* – Similar to adult risks – respiratory illness, hearing loss, entanglement in machinery and equipment rollovers. *Prevention* – Education, proper maintenance and making sure all guards and shields are in place. Make sure eye, ear, and lung protection are available and used. *Appropriate Chores* – Operating well-maintained machinery, livestock and power tools. Encourage them to teach siblings and younger children about farm safety.

For additional information, contact your local Outreach and Extension Center or the MU Extension Rural Safety and Health Program at 1.800.995.8503.

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