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By [Vincent Iannelli, M.D.](http://pediatrics.about.com/bio/Vincent-Iannelli-M-D-8777.htm)

Updated November 13, 2011

Most of us have [smoke detectors](http://pediatrics.about.com/od/firesafety/a/Smoke-Detectors.htm) in our home. Smoke detectors are the best way to alert your family if there is a fire in your home. Of course, it has to be a working smoke detector, so be sure to test it each month and change the [smoke detector batteries](http://pediatrics.about.com/od/firesafety/a/smoke-alarm-batteries.htm) at least once a year.

Having working smoke alarms shouldn't be the end of your family's fire safety planning, though. Your kids need to know what to do when a smoke alarm goes off.

A fire escape plan can help make sure everyone knows how to get out of the house as quickly as possible, which is important in a situation where every second counts.

### Home Fire Escape Plan

In its simplest form, a fire escape plan would just include instructions for everyone to get out of the house as quickly as possible and to meet at a designated place outside.

Having a meeting place is important so that you won't think that someone is still in the house. A mailbox in the front of the house is a commonly used meeting place. If you don't have one, consider using a tree, light pole or even your neighbor's house - just make sure it is a safe distance from your house.

Ideally, your fire escape plan won't be quite so simple; after all, what are your kids going to do if their usual way out of the house is blocked by the fire?

A more useful home fire escape plan would include:

* A map of your home
* Well-marked windows and doors that can be opened in each room
* Two ways out of each room or living area
* Your family's meeting place outside the house

Although that might seem like a lot of work, most kids actually enjoy drawing out a floor plan of their home and marking the possible ways out of each room.

### Home Fire Drill

Once you have a fire escape plan, it is time to practice it.

Although you don't want to terrorize your kids by waking them up in the middle of the night for their first fire drill, you should likely practice your fire escape plan once during the day and again at night. And practice your plan using different exits.

Most importantly, make sure that:

* Everyone knows to stay low when getting out of the house, to keep away from the smoke
* Everyone can easily open all windows and doors that could be used as a part of your fire escape plan. Make sure windows aren't painted or nailed shut and that window guards or burglar bars can be opened
* Kids know that they are supposed to get out quickly and shouldn't try to save a pet or their favorite possessions
* You warn everyone before they go to bed if you're having a fire drill in the middle of the night.
* Adults have worked out who will be responsible for helping get out any younger children, kids who may not wake up to the sound of a smoke alarm or other family members who can't get out on their own
* Kids know how to check closed doors for heat before opening them. They should use the back of their hand to feel the doorknob, the top of the door and the opening under the door for heat. They should never open a hot door.
* Everyone knows that they should close doors to rooms as they leave them to slow the spread of the fire
* You practice setting up an escape ladder to get out of the second floor (although your kids shouldn't actually practice climbing down the ladder or doing anything else that could be dangerous)
* Someone is responsible for calling the fire department once they have gotten outside
* No one goes back inside the house

Continue to practice your fire drill every six months.

Sources:

<http://pediatrics.about.com/od/firesafety/a/fire-escape-plan.htm>

American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement. Reducing the Number of Deaths and Injuries From Residential Fires. Pediatrics 2000 105: 1355-1357