

# Learn to Live Safely

with disabilities and special health needs

## Ready to Learn to Live Safely

Safety education is essential for everyone, yet it is often inaccessible to individuals with disabilities or special health needs. Traditional programs frequently fail to address diverse learning styles and unique challenges, leaving individuals without the tools to prevent injuries, respond to emergencies, and navigate everyday risks confidently. The *Living Safely for People with Disabilities and Special Health Needs* initiative addresses these gaps through an innovative, universally designed curriculum available via the Living Safely with Disabilities and Special Health Needs **Online Center for Safety** at [rwjbh.org/cshlivingsafely](http://rwjbh.org/cshlivingsafely).

This initiative, developed by Children's Specialized Hospital, provides practical tools, resources, and information to promote safety in an inclusive and accessible way. It covers topics such as poison prevention, emergency preparedness, fire safety, and more. By utilizing the tools and resources available at the Online Center for Safety, educators, caregivers, and community leaders can create meaningful safety education experiences for individuals of all abilities.

## Ready to Learn to Live Safely Pilot

The *Living Safely* initiative was successfully implemented in two New Jersey schools, Newmark Education and Alpine Learning Group, with 50 de-identified student participants representing. *Ready to Learn to Live Safely* introduced the Living safely resources into these schools, providing a foundation for inclusive and accessible safety education. Both schools demonstrated that the initiative could be effectively integrated into educational settings to teach safety skills, empower learners, and improve confidence in real-world situations.

Educators at both schools used multiple lesson formats, including visual aids, narrated picture stories, group discussions, and hands-on practice. For instance, in the “What to do if you get lost” lesson, group discussions allowed learners to gain new perspectives and build confidence in asking for help. Simulated scenarios in the “Parking lot safety” lesson reinforced safe pedestrian practices and improved real-world application.

The skills taught through this initiative had tangible impact. For example, a participant who took a double dose of medication recalled the Poison Control hotline learned on the poison prevention lesson and immediately sought help, demonstrating the importance of knowledge generalization. Similarly, learners applied their parking lot safety skills during school outings, successfully navigating crowded areas and communicating with drivers.

Pre- and post-tests conducted across lessons demonstrated the program’s effectiveness. In the poison prevention lessons, proficiency increased from 0% to 91.5% after instruction, as learners practiced recognizing hazardous substances and accessing resources like poison control hotlines. Similarly, in parking lot safety, proficiency rose from 59.5% to 100%, equipping participants with strategies for navigating parking lots safely and communicating with drivers. In the password security lessons, the curriculum, supported by interactive discussions and visual aids improved proficiency from 26% to 100%, empowering learners to create secure passwords and identify risks. These measurable outcomes highlight the curriculum’s ability to teach not only knowledge but also real-world application.

The program also addressed challenges in engagement and accessibility. Some learners initially resisted lessons tied to disability-specific resources, emphasizing the importance of inclusive language. For example, emergency preparedness lessons were reframed to focus on readiness and communication rather than vulnerability, helping participants see the value of being prepared. Educators also worked to maintain engagement for learners at varying skill levels. Advanced participants took on mentoring roles, while those needing additional support benefited from repeated practice and small-group instruction.

Community engagement and collaboration with community stakeholders was central to the initiative’s success. Law enforcement officers and poison control experts provided real-world insights and led interactive activities. During the “What to do if a police officer wants to talk with me?” lesson, officers worked with learners to practice respectful and safe interactions, helping participants build confidence in unfamiliar situations. Caregivers also played a crucial role by reinforcing lessons at home.



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Real-world applications of the curriculum further demonstrated its impact. In one case, a learner who accidentally took a double dose of medication immediately notified a caregiver and called Poison Control, recalling the steps practiced during the poison prevention lessons. Similarly, the “Password Security” lesson enabled students to recognize phishing scams and create strong passwords, helping them navigate technology safely. These examples illustrate how the methodology equips learners with skills they can use in their daily lives.

Safety education requires an approach that focuses on flexible, evidence-based methods that adapt to the diverse needs of learners. Effective safety instruction prioritizes strategies that address different learning styles and enable meaningful engagement and real-world application. By emphasizing universally designed resources and dynamic instructional practices, the *Ready to Learn to Live Safely* initiative ensures that all participants, regardless of ability or background, gain the skills needed to navigate a variety of safety scenarios

*The Living Safely for People with Disabilities and Special Health Needs* curriculum offers a powerful solution to the historical gaps in safety education. By providing accessible materials, emphasizing collaboration, and focusing on real-world applications, it empowers learners to navigate their environments safely and effectively. Educators, caregivers, and community leaders must champion this program to ensure its reach and impact continue to grow. Inclusive safety education is a necessity. The *Living Safely* curriculum sets the standard for what inclusive safety education can and should be. Together, we can create environments where all individuals are empowered to lead safer, more independent lives.



Living Safely with Disabilities and Special Health Needs  
Online Center for Safety

[www.rwjbh.org/cshlivingsafely](http://www.rwjbh.org/cshlivingsafely)

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# Ready to Learn to Live Safely Instructor's Guide

This instructor's guide is designed to support educators and caregivers in using the Living Safely curriculum effectively. The guide provides step-by-step instructions for implementing lessons, ensuring that all learners can access and apply critical safety skills.

## Core Objectives

The primary goal of this guide is to provide a model for teaching safety that is

- accessible (lessons designed to meet diverse learning needs)
- functional (lessons focused on real-life application and relevance)
- empowering (lessons equip learners to navigate their environments safely and independently)

These lessons cover essential topics to help ensure learners develop the knowledge and confidence to stay safe in everyday and high-risk situations.

## Who Can Use This Guide?

By adopting these lessons, professionals across disciplines can empower individuals of all abilities to develop critical safety skills. This guide is intended for a wide range of professionals and settings, including but not limited to

- Educators
- Therapists
- Health care providers
- Higher education professionals and students
- Community safety and emergency professionals
- Public service providers
- Caregivers and family members



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## Getting Started

Introduce the selected lesson in the format(s) that best meet the learners' needs. Safety lessons are available in multiple formats to ensure accessibility and engagement. These flexible formats enable instructors to tailor the lessons to the needs of their students, whether they are young children, teens, adults, or individuals with specific disabilities or learning styles.

- Plain text (simplified written language for straightforward instruction)
- Text with pictures (written language paired with visual aids for enhanced comprehension)
- Picture stories (first-person pictorial learning using images to illustrate key points)
- Narrated picture stories (first-person narrated picture stories with audio narration to support auditory learners or those who benefit from combined modalities)
- Audio only (spoken instructions for learners who prefer or require auditory input)

While these lessons are designed with individuals with disabilities and special health needs in mind, their universal design ensures that they are practical, engaging, and beneficial for all learners. Whether implemented in schools, healthcare settings, universities, or community programs, this guide provides a flexible framework for teaching safety in ways that are understandable, functional, and empowering.

By equipping individuals with the tools and confidence to stay safe, this model supports lifelong safety education and injury prevention, ensuring that no learner is left behind. The lessons are based on the following safety categories, drawn from the *Living Safely with Disability and Special Health Needs* resources. These can be found on the Living Safely Online Center for Safety:

- Emergency Preparedness
- Fire Safety
- Internet Safety
- Medication Safety
- Poison Prevention
- Recreational Safety
- School Safety
- Water Safety
- Transportation Safety

## Implementing the Lessons

Each lesson is ready-made and can be introduced as follows:

1. **Pre-test**  
Begin with a pre-test to assess baseline understanding and identify areas of focus. Pre-tests should be conducted before teaching any lessons to determine baseline knowledge.
2. **Introduce the Lesson**  
Present the material in the format(s) that best suit the learner's needs.
3. **Reinforce the Lesson**  
Use tools such as role-playing, group discussions, visual aids, or hands-on activities to deepen understanding.
4. **Community Engagement**  
Invite subject matter experts (e.g., police officers, emergency preparedness representatives, poison control educators) to provide real-world context and reinforce key concepts.
5. **Practice and Generalization**  
Teach and practice skills in various settings (e.g., classroom, playground, home) and with different individuals (e.g., peers, caregivers, professionals).
6. **Post-test**  
Conclude with a post-test to measure progress and identify areas for further practice.

## Key Considerations for Educators

- Select lesson formats and tools that align with each learner's abilities and preferences. Modify content as needed to ensure accessibility and relevance.
- Intermix materials, visual aids, and role playing along the way to increase generalization of skills.
- Integrate safety skills into daily routines and revisit lessons throughout the year. Reinforce lessons in natural environments to promote generalization.

- Work with interdisciplinary teams, including other educators, therapists, and community professionals to enhance learning.
- The following list are examples of student assessments to assist instructors in evaluating student knowledge and skills through observation and practice. While several skills are grouped for the purposes of this guide, each specific skill should be assessed individually to ensure students understand and can demonstrate proficiency in each area. By evaluating each skill separately, instructors can ensure comprehensive learning and identify areas needing further support.
- Understanding and responding to emergencies
  - Student knows what 911 is, when and why to call, and how to interact with a dispatcher.
  - Student demonstrates listening, answering, and following directions during mock 911 calls.
  - Student understands what poisoning is, can identify potential poisons, and knows when to contact the Poison Control Center versus calling 911.
- Recognizing and interacting with police officers
  - Student identifies police officers and understands their role.
  - Student interacts respectfully and comfortably with police officers, including expressing personal needs and asking for clarification when needed.
  - Student understands personal boundaries, such as keeping a safe distance and not touching officers without permission.
  - Student participates in practice interactions with police officers.
- Appropriate public restroom usage
  - Student identifies public restrooms, including gender-specific signs, and feels comfortable using them.
  - Student understands the purpose of a public restroom (e.g., toileting, handwashing) and practices privacy, hygiene, and cleanliness.
  - Student recognizes when a restroom is occupied, waits in line when needed, and identifies safety concerns, seeking help when necessary.
- Staying safe when leaving a location
  - Student informs a responsible adult when leaving a location and identifies trustworthy adults.
  - Student knows what items to carry when leaving a safe place and uses identification.



- Student communicates with a responsible adult after arriving at or leaving a destination.
- Practicing self-calming and navigation skills
  - Student uses their self-calming techniques to manage stress.
  - Student identifies landmarks, signs, and community helpers to navigate unfamiliar areas.
- Seeking and receiving help
  - Student knows who to call and how to ask for help in emergencies.
  - Student interacts confidently with community helpers and participates in mock community outings to practice these skills.
  - Student clearly communicates needs, uses a phone in emergencies, and understands alternate ways to seek help.
  - Student follows instructions from others but knows what to do if they feel unsafe while getting help.

## Expanding the Model

These lessons serve as a foundation for teaching safety skills but can and should be expanded upon to address additional topics or customized to meet specific needs. Instructors are encouraged to

- create new lessons using the same accessible and universal design principles
- collaborate with students, caregivers, and subject matter experts to identify relevant safety concerns
- explore ways to integrate safety education into broader life skills or community-based programs



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This initiative was funded in part by an Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant from the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services.

Inclusive Healthy Communities (IHC) is a grant program established in 2021 by the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services. IHC supports communities and ensures the voice and needs of individuals with disabilities are included in healthy community planning. The program funds New Jersey communities and organizations engaged in projects that promote the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities in the communities where they live.



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## About the Organizations



As the nation's leading provider of inpatient and outpatient care for children with special health care needs, Children's Specialized Hospital is dedicated to improving the lives of children and families. It offers a wide range of specialized services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, developmental pediatrics, and more. For more information, visit Children's Specialized Hospital at [rwjbh.org/childrens-specialized-hospital](http://rwjbh.org/childrens-specialized-hospital)



Newmark Education is a state-of-the-art educational institution serving students with autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorders, and other developmental disabilities. It provides individualized academic and therapeutic programs designed to meet each student's unique needs. For more information, visit Newmark Education at [newmarkeducation.com](http://newmarkeducation.com)



Alpine Learning Group: Alpine Learning Group is a recognized leader in autism education, offering innovative, evidence-based programs for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. It provides early intervention, school programs, adult services, and consultation. For more information, visit Alpine Learning Group at [alpinelearninggroup.org](http://alpinelearninggroup.org)

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For more Living Safely resources, visit [rwjbh.org/cshlivingsafely](http://rwjbh.org/cshlivingsafely)

Contact us at [livingsafely@childrens-specialized.org](mailto:livingsafely@childrens-specialized.org)



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