

Match Age, Abilities To Farm Chores¹

Charles V. Schwab, John Schutske and Laura Miller²

- *A 3-year-old girl rides in her father's tractor cab as he mows his field. The tractor hits a bump, the locked door pops open and the toddler tumbles out. She is crushed by a tractor wheel before her father has time to react.*
- *The boy, 6, was doing his chores, cleaning out horse stalls alone in the family barn. But when a horse is spooked, he is kicked and severely hurt.*
- *This 12-year-old had helped his father unload grain many times. But this time he was caught in a spinning sweep auger inside the bin; he will never be able to offer the same kind of help again.*

The importance of safety is illustrated by these tragic but true stories of Iowa farm youth. Farm accidents that involve children may seem unpredictable, stealing young lives at random, in situations that could not have been avoided. However, most farm accidents can be prevented. In these cases, the child acted in a way that was consistent with his or her developmental ability, and was hurt or killed because of it.

In Iowa, farm-related accidents every year claim young lives or leave youth with lifelong disabilities. According to the Iowa Department of Public Health, 679 youth under age 19 were injured and 13 died in

farm-related accidents in 1992. For all ages, more than half of the injuries were work-related. In the 16-19 year category, three-fourths occurred during chores.

Causes vary with the child's age. Reports show that 120 injuries (18 percent) were the result of farm animals or livestock. Another 109 injuries (16 percent) were related to machinery, and 97 injuries (14 percent) were caused by a fall or slip.

One publication cannot address the causes and cures for all farm-related accidents. However, it can offer some general guidelines for adults to use when providing careful supervision, assigning chores, and teaching about safety in ways that are appropriate for the youth's age and abilities.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

As all children grow, they pass through a series of developmental stages. Physical changes are obvious, as a child grows taller and stronger. Mental and emotional changes are difficult to detect unless adults understand characteristics of each stage.

Most accidents occur when a child is doing something that is beyond his or her mental, physical or emotional ability. For example, a two-year-old may be barely able to talk but is an active learner eager to explore his sensory world. If he sees someone hide a colorful bottle in a cabinet, he will do his best to get at it, open the bottle and taste its contents; even if he has

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2. Prepared by Charles V. Schwab, ISU Extension safety specialist; John Schutske, Minnesota Extension safety specialist, and Laura Miller, ISU Extension communications. Design by Valerie King, Iowa State University Extension, Ames, Iowa.

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been warned and even if it tastes terrible. Preschool children are not developmentally ready to understand cause and effect relationships. They need physical barriers such as fences, gates and locks, to keep them away from danger.

On the other hand, teen-aged youth are mentally equipped to understand that risky behavior often has unpleasant consequences. However, they often are driven to ignore common sense to satisfy the emotional need for experimentation or excitement, typical of that age.

A 16-year-old who drives her father's truck too fast on a gravel road probably knows the speed limit. She probably remembers her parents' warnings. But she's speeding because she wants to, perhaps to

provide thrills for lack of anything else to do. Parents of teen-aged youth must acknowledge their psychological needs and provide safe challenges such as sports, activities with other youth their age, and new experiences.

Table 1 is a chart with common characteristics of youth at different stages. Typical risks on Iowa farms are listed, plus suggestions for action.

Farm youth spend most of their waking hours in one of the nation's most dangerous workplaces, agriculture. They routinely encounter hazards in farm chores. They must know what to do during busy seasons when adult family members may be preoccupied with other tasks. By understanding the stages of a child's growth and development, adults can help protect farm youth from needless harm.

Table 1.

Ages and Stages	Characteristics	Cause of most farm injuries	Suggestions
Toddler/preschool (0-5 years)	Unable to understand cause and effect Illogical, "magic" thinking Fascinated by movement May love to climb Curious	Slips and falls Machinery Animals	Supervise carefully Use physical barriers, i.e. locks and fences Provide safe distractions Prohibit riding on machinery
Early school (5-9 years)	Inconsistent use of logic Wishes to seem competent Wants adult approval Unaware of realistic danger (Kidnapping or war, rather than falling off machinery)	Slips and falls Machinery Being struck by an object	Provide consistent rules Discuss safe behavior Assign simple farm chores with careful supervision
Older school (10-13 years)	More physical, mental skills Physical development often outstrips mental, emotional maturity Wants social, peer approval Wishes to practice new skills without constant eye	Animals Machinery Recreational vehicles (ATVs, bikes)	Enforce consistent rules with consequences and rewards Expose youth to machinery by letting them "help" you with maintenance Talk to peers who've been hurt in farm accidents
Adolescence (13-16 years)	Desire to experiment Strong need for peer acceptance May resist adult authority	Animals Machinery Power tools Slips and falls	Enforce consistent rules Begin tractor training, supervised use of tractors Encourage safety projects in 4-H, FFA, other groups
Young Adult (16-18 years)	Increases sense of adult responsibility, competence Desires to be supportive, to do adult work Needs to take risks Feelings of "immortality"	Animals Machinery Power tools Slips and falls	Use clear consistent rules regarding drugs, alcohol Reward acceptance of adult responsibilities Provide opportunity to be a role model in safety

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YOUTH SAFETY

How Much Do You Know?

1. Most five- and six-year-olds understand that one action leads to another, that behavior has consequences. True or false?
2. At what age does a child's physical ability exceed mental or emotional maturity?
 - a. 3
 - b. 10-13
 - c. 15
 - d. 18
3. How many Iowa youth were injured on farms in 1992?
 - a. less than 50
 - b. 50-500
 - c. 500-5,000
 - d. more than 5,000
4. Accidents involving children are unpredictable and cannot be prevented. True or false?
5. Animals and livestock are the leading cause of farm-related injury for Iowa youth. True or false?

See answers at the end of "What Can You Do?".

What Can You Do?

You can avoid some of the risks of agriculture and protect family members by becoming aware of safety and following these steps:

- Develop family rules for your farm appropriate to the age and state of each family member.
- Encourage youth's involvement in farm safety projects, either as a member of a group or as a family.
- Inspect your farm for obvious hazards and remove these dangers.
- Teach youth proper safety skills and be a role model in your daily work.

Answers to quiz:

1-False; 2-b; 3-c; 4-False; 5-True.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To learn more about farm safety, check out these Safe Farm publications that highlight youth; *Extra Riders Mean Extra Dangers*, Pm-1518c, and *Review Family Farm Safety Rules*, Pm-1265g.
- Your local extension office also has information about 4-H and youth safety programs, including the *Safety Project Guide*, 4H-692-MP.
- Another resource is a reprint of a special section, "We Kill Too Many Farm Kids," that appeared in *Successful Farming*. To order, call Farm Safety 4 Just Kids at (515) 758-2827. Cost item.