Is safe storage of firearms possible?
Safe storage of guns is something of a contradiction in terms, given the evidence that their mere presence in a home increases the risk of being used for suicide by a family member (JAMA 1991;266:2989–95). This study of all US states, including 12 which had firearms storage laws during at least one year of the 16 year study period, sought to determine whether legal requirements for storage were associated with reduced firearms mortality among children younger than 15 years (JAMA 1997;278:1084–6). Unintentional shooting deaths, the primary objective of the laws, were 23% lower than expected in the 12 states, and modest but non-significant declines were also noted in homicide and suicide deaths. The authors estimate that 39 deaths were prevented in the states with safe storage laws and that 216 deaths could have been prevented had similar laws been adopted nationwide.

Is safe motor vehicle transport possible?
Four items focus on different aspects of motor vehicle travel. A Scottish study reveals a new finding: that drivers with more than five demerit points on their licences were five times more likely to have had a motor vehicle crash in which a child was injured or drivers with unblemished driver records (<0.001) to have had a motor vehicle crash in which a child was injured. Drivers with more than five demerit points on their licences were five times more likely to have had a motor vehicle crash in which a child was injured. The study’s results are in agreement with the hypothesis that those with more convictions are at higher risk of causing a crash involving a child, and are at higher risk of causing a crash involving a child. In addition, the study’s results are consistent with the idea that those with more convictions are at higher risk of causing a crash involving a child. The authors suggest that future research should focus on the effects of different types of convictions on the likelihood of causing a crash involving a child.

Determination of injury risk
A Tennessee study differentiated children into “high risk” and “low risk” groups, based on maternal education, age, and number of children in the family, and applied the criteria to 1259 children aged 0–4 years who died of injuries between 1978 and 1995. Prior research had shown children in the highest risk groups (28% of the population) accounted for almost half of the deaths with rates of 48.9 per 100 000 child years v 16.8 deaths/100 000 for low risk groups. Children in both low risk and high risk groups experienced modest declines in rates over time, attributable to the decline in passenger deaths. Apart from a decline in motor vehicle deaths, however, there were no reductions for any type of injury for high risk children over time. Instead, an alarming increase in the 1992–95 period from 45.9/100 000 to 64.0/100 000 from asphyxiation and intentional injuries further increased the disparity (Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine 1997;151:1216–9).

Flame burns
The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission permitted a relaxation in the strict standards for children’s nighttime wear in 1997—“sleepwear for infants under 9 months of age and close fitting nightwear for sizes 0–14 are no longer required to meet the flammability standard, nor are warning labels required. Fewer parents are choosing traditional nightwear and children are wearing loose fitting cotton T-shirts as nightwear. The concern is that the number of children who are fatally burned wearing these garments is three times the number burned wearing traditional nightwear, and the authors believe that parents are unaware of the impact of the regulatory changes (Journal of Burn Care and Rehabilitation 1997;18:469–74). Another risk situation for children occurs during outdoor activities involving cooking and camping when children are burned falling into fire pits, throwing flammable substances onto fires, placing their hands on hot objects near fires, walking or falling into extinguished embers, and upsetting insect repellent candles and lanterns inside tents. The one fatality in this Boston study was of a 2 year old caught in a tent fire. The Shriners Burns Institute group acted by preparing warning fliers for distribution to campers in national and state parks (Journal of Burn Care and Rehabilitation 1997;18:369–71).

Adolescents are different, but why?
We all know that adolescents adopt risk taking behaviours as part of normal development but how far can risk taking go before it becomes unacceptable? One study of over 1000 adolescents aged 14–18 years found a significant relationship between risk taking and self reported injury; the strongest predictor for injury was having a friend injured the same way (Journal of Pediatric Psychology 1997;22:513–31). The US national longitudinal study on adolescent health found that school and family social settings are most critical in adolescence, and that protective factors include adolescents’ perceptions of caring by and connectedness to others. If parents provide homes without easy access to guns, alcohol, tobacco and illicit substances, give their adolescents time (both to monitor activities and to engender a sense of belonging), adolescents are less likely to engage in self harming behaviours such as suicide, interpersonal violence, and substance abuse. Fatigue and excessive income from working more than 20 hours per week can impact on adolescents’ levels of emotional distress, substance use and sexual experimentation (JAMA 1997;278:823–32).