Introducing
SAFE SITTER

Celebrating 40 years

Patricia A. Keener, M.D. is known for many things, but perhaps most enduring is her deep and genuine love for children of all ages. As a physician, mother, and grandmother, and founder of Safe Sitter, Inc., she has spent a lifetime both caring for children and educating others that care for them.

Safe Sitter® was born of Dr. Keener’s response to a tragedy. When a young child died from choking while in the care of an adult babysitter, Dr. Keener resolved to teach young adolescents choking rescue skills so that they would know what to do from their very first babysitting job. She recruited doctors, nurses, and others to join her in helping to launch this new program, and before long, Safe Sitter® evolved into more than just a class; it was a cause.

This year, Safe Sitter® celebrates the 40th anniversary of our first student class. With that, we also celebrate nearly 200 lives that have been saved by students using the life-saving skills they learned in class. Over 600,000 students have completed a Safe Sitter® course and in each and every class, students are told the story that started Safe Sitter®.

Within these pages, we share that story with you, we look to the future, and we honor our founder, Patricia A. Keener, M.D.

History of Safe Sitter, Inc.

Why We Started

Safe Sitter® began because of a tragedy. In 1980, Patricia A. Keener, M.D. was pregnant with her third child and worked as the Director of Nurseries at Community Hospital in Indianapolis, IN. One spring morning as Dr. Keener was talking with a nurse who was a new mother, she received a page to help a child who had choked. She immediately rushed to the emergency room to help this child, but it was too late. The child had died.

Dr. Keener soon realized that little girl was the daughter of the nurse she had just spoken to and the choking incident occurred while under the care of an adult babysitter. Dr. Keener recognized the vulnerability of young children when cared for by unprepared providers and was surprised to learn how many people who care for young children are not equipped to prevent injuries and handle emergencies.

That afternoon, as Dr. Keener picked up her children from school, the Safe Sitter® course was born. The first Safe Sitter® class was held for about a dozen sixth-grade students at Park Tudor school where her children attended. After the first class, the need for a babysitting safety class for young teens became clearly evident. Just a few months after the very first class, Dr. Keener offered the class at Community Hospital East where fifty children attended.

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**WHERE WE HAVE BEEN**

The popularity of Safe Sitter® continued to gain momentum throughout the 80s. In 1985, the organization was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and the first Board of Directors were formed. Two years later, Lilly Endowment awarded a three-year grant to take Safe Sitter® nation-wide.

Dr. Keener began traveling across the country training others to be Safe Sitter® Instructors. During this time, she was recognized by the American Academy of Pediatrics for excellence in pediatric education and appeared on national television with Joan Lunden on Good Morning America, Maria Shriver on CBS This Morning, and Katie Couric on The Today Show.

By 1995, Safe Sitter® had expanded to all 50 states and could be found on the internet. In 2000, Safe Sitter® received a grant from Lilly of nearly $1 million to support the first major revision of the curriculum and re-training of instructors. DVD technology allowed all Safe Sitter® Instructors to include CPR education in class.

As Dr. Keener embraced retirement as a pediatrician and neonatologist, she knew that it was time to transition her role as Medical Director to a successor. Dr. Keener had mentored many physicians throughout her career but she had meant something special to a young Indianapolis doctor who now had several children of her own. In 2011, Sara Ross, M.D. joined Safe Sitter® as Assistant Medical Director and then succeeded Dr. Keener as Medical Director one year later.

In 2019, Safe Sitter® created a YouTube series called Babysitter Boss. With nearly 10,000 subscribers and surpassing 100,000 views each month, young teens across the world are learning safe babysitting skills and have a safe space to ask babysitting questions and receive developmentally appropriate and medically accurate answers. Some of the videos are incorporated into Safe Sitter® classes, making the class experience more engaging for students.

**WHERE WE ARE NOW**

Forty years after that first class, Safe Sitter® continues to be taught across the United States and Canada to students eager to start babysitting. While the fundamentals of babysitting and safely caring for children have not changed, the needs and experiences of students have changed, and Safe Sitter® has adapted to those needs.

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Safe Sitter® created a YouTube series called Babysitter Boss, with over 6000 subscribers, and surpassing a half million views each month.

To further the vision that all children should be safe, additional programs have been created and can be taught by any adult that enjoys teaching children. Safe@Home is a home alone safety preparedness class for students in grades 4-6. Intro to Safe Babysitting is a child care class designed specifically for Girl Scouts and other groups of teens that do not have access to a Safe Sitter® class.

In celebration of our 40th anniversary, we are excited to announce the launch of our newest program, Getting Started as Grandparents. Our first generation of students are now on the cusp of watching the children they raised become parents. We were honored to teach them the skills they needed to become better sitters as teens, and those skills led them to become better parents as adults. As they now face a new journey in child care, we look forward to once again equipping them, as well as other adults becoming grandparents, with the skills they need to care for their grandchildren.
Dr. Keener’s impact through the years

I first met Dr. Keener over 20 years ago when I was a college student seeking a career mentorship in medicine. Her energy was infectious, and within just a few minutes I knew what the most important things in her life were—her family, contributing to the wellbeing of neonates and children, educating the next generation of parents and physicians, and in a perfect marriage of the first three things—Safe Sitter®. Throughout my final college years and medical school during which I worked with Dr. Keener in the Office of Medical Service Learning, I tried to absorb everything I could from her.

Read everything you can get your hands on.

Value your time and expect others to do the same.

Know the limitations of your knowledge and skills.

Contribute to your community beyond the profession.

Be grateful. Be honest. Spread kindness.

Be passionate about the things you care about.

Laughter is the best medicine.

This is just a sliver of what Dr. Keener has imparted to me over the years. Although I feared my pursuit of pediatric critical care instead of neonatology might affect our relationship, Dr. Keener continued to enthusiastically support me in every endeavor.

When Dr. Keener asked me to consider taking on the role of Medical Director of Safe Sitter® several years ago, I was incredibly honored, nervous to fill such enormous shoes, and appreciative of the opportunity to contribute to something about which she feels so committed and passionate. I will never come close to appropriately thanking Dr. Keener for the impact she has had on my career and my life, but through Safe Sitter® I can both honor her legacy and use my knowledge and experience as a physician and an educator to contribute to the wellbeing of communities near and far.

— Sara Ross, M.D.

Dr. Keener has a special ability to fully engage with children. When she’s around children it’s almost as if she’s shifting into a higher gear as she shines the full power of her focus on them. And they respond with appreciation and admiration that last a lifetime. She once wrote, “Children bring to our lives many gifts including wisdom and wonder.” I believe the same is true of Dr. Keener.

— Sally Herrholz

I consider Dr. Patricia Keener a mentor in life and am privileged to have shared so many treasured moments together... I will never forget Dr. Keener’s words about when people evaluate their life near death, what holds the most significance is having an impact greater than one-self and leaving the world a better place for having been in it. Dr. Patricia Keener exemplifies these virtues and achieved them 40 years ago when she created Safe Sitter®!

— Renee McCabe

Every day I am reminded of Dr. Keener’s commitment to children and her dedication to Safe Sitter®. She inspires me to keep Safe Sitter® thriving so that babysitters all across the country have access to quality safety education and child care training. Safe Sitter® graduates know what to do to keep themselves and the children they care for safe, and that is an incredible tribute to our founder.

— Barbara Stuckwisch

It has been an honor to be part of this great organization and to learn from the master herself, Patricia A. Keener, M.D. Dr. Keener turned a tragedy into a course that has saved over 175 lives since its inception. Now that’s amazing!

— Donna Willis-Brown

At one of our National Trainer training days [Dr. Keener] talked about a triangle, the triangle we must emulate of career, family and community. [She] inspired me to always give back to the community. As I have matured over the years, I use that wisdom advice to this day.

— Susan McAlister

Read the full stories at safesitter.org/40years.
thank you for helping us hit this milestone!

Thank you to our founder, current and former board members, donors, staff, and Registered Providers for helping Safe Sitter® reach 40 years. The Safe Sitter® class experience students had 40 years ago is quite different from the experience students have today and will likely be different 40 years from now.

But one thing will always remain: every child should be safe.

2020 SAFE SITTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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