Choking, Suffocation, Strangulation and Entrapment Safety

Key Facts

- Each year, approximately 873 children ages 14 and under die from airway obstruction injuries.¹

- Children sustain approximately 18,000 suffocation injuries each year.²

- More than 19,000 children were treated in hospital emergency rooms for choking-related episodes in 2005.³

- In 2004, 963 children ages 14 and under died from an unintentional strangulation injury; 88 percent of these deaths occurred to children under 4 years of age.⁴

- Choking accounts for 44 percent of all toy-related fatalities.⁵

- Each year, cribs and playpens are responsible for half of all nursery product-related deaths among children ages 5 and under.⁶

- Cribs, often older or used cribs, are responsible for 26 strangulation and suffocation deaths each year.⁷

Who, Where and How

- The majority of childhood suffocation, choking and strangulation incidents occur in the home.⁸ ⁹

- 60 percent of infants suffocate in the sleeping environment as a result of pillows/cushions blocking their airway while sleeping.¹⁰

- The majority of childhood choking injuries are associated with food items, including hot dogs, candies, nuts, grapes, carrots and popcorn.¹¹ ¹²

- Non-food choking hazards tend to be round in nature, such as coins, small balls, and/or objects that conform, like balloons.¹³

- Common items that strangle children include clothing drawstrings, ribbons, necklaces, pacifier strings, and window blind and drapery cords.¹⁴ ¹⁵ Items with strings longer than seven inches are considered a strangulation risk for children.
Openings that permit the passage of a child’s body but are too small for his or her head, can lead to entrapment and strangulation. Hazards include bunk beds, cribs, playground equipment, baby strollers, carriages, and high chairs.16

Children ages 4 and under, especially under age 1, are at greatest risk for all forms of airway obstruction injury.17 Children 4 years and under are 15 times more likely to experience a suffocation death than children between 5-14 years of age.18

Children placed in adult beds are at increased risk for airway obstruction injury. Since 1990, at least 296 children under 2 years of age have died in adult beds as a result of entrapment in the bed structure. Furthermore, 209 children in this age group died in adult beds from smothering as a result of being overlain by another person.19 20

How This Relates to Babyproofing

- Products we use for baby proofing should not be choking hazards, ie, outlet caps or small pieces of cushioning
- Replace door stops with cushioned tips to keep children from pulling them off and choking on them.
- Gates should have no spaces around them over 3”
- Use of cabinet and door latches to keep suffocation and strangulation hazards away from children under 3 years old.
- Top lid chests should be equipped with safety hinges and ventilation holes.
- Know safety guidelines for crib slat spacing (2 3/8” or too small to pass a soda can through) and relate that to railings and adult furniture.
- Openings that permit the passage of a child’s body but are too small for his or her head, can lead to entrapment and strangulation. Hazards include bunk beds, cribs, playground equipment, baby strollers, carriages, and high chairs
- Most current building codes require spacing to be no more than 4” apart on railings and balustrades, which may still be too large for small children.
- Installation of railing guards can help prevent strangulation in wider spaces.
- Window blind cords should be fastened to the wall, cleats installed to wrap cords, tassels split or replaced with safety tassels, or blind cord safety stops should be in place. Ultimately there should be no unsecured loops, even on high cords. Roman shades can not be made safe.
- Keep all window pull cords and inner lift cords out of the reach of children. Make sure that tasseled pull cords are short and continuous-loop cord are permanently anchored to the floor or wall. Make sure cord stops are properly installed and adjusted to limit movement of inner lift cords.
- Lock cords into position whenever horizontal blinds or shades are lowered, including when they come to rest on a windowsill.
How to retrofit
http://www.windowcoverings.org/basic_cord_safety.html
If older window treatments are kept, the following instructions will help retrofit them.

ELIMINATE LOOPED PULL CORDS
(pre-1995 mini-blinds and pleated shades)

1. Cut the looped pull cord above the tassel, and remove equalizer buckle (if any).
2. Insert cord through tassel and tie cord ends to secure the tassel.

INSTALL CORD STOPS
(all pre-2001 horizontal blinds and corded shades)

1. Lower the blind to its proper length and lock cords into position at head rail.
2. For each pull cord:
   - Pinch together a portion of the pull cord to create a loop near the head rail, then slide the cord stop over the loop end.
   - Slip the free end of the pull cord through the loop to loosely knot the cord stop onto the pull cord.
   - Tighten the knot to secure the cord stop one to two inches below the head rail to limit movement of inner lift cords.

INSTALL TIE-DOWN DEVICES
(pre-1997 vertical blinds and draperies)

1. Insert cord or chain into tie-down device.
2. Attach the tie-down device to the floor or wall so that the cord is fully extended and securely fastened.

Safety Tips For Parents:
- Be able to identify size of objects that could be choking hazards, the CPSC small object tester may be used or the cardboard tube from a toilet paper roll can be used to show conservative guideline.
- Any thin plastic material can be a suffocation hazard; dry cleaner, garbage and retail plastic bags, cellophane, latex balloons, etc.
- Jump ropes, drawstrings on clothing and jewelry could become entangled and create a strangulation hazard.
- Use of crib bumpers is not recommended. For more information go to [http://www.sidsalliance.com/print_friendly/researchstudy_crib.html](http://www.sidsalliance.com/print_friendly/researchstudy_crib.html)
- Install only cordless window coverings in young children’s bedrooms and play areas. Window blinds, corded shades and draperies manufactured before 2001 should be replaced with today’s safer products.
- Move all cribs, beds, furniture and toys away from windows and window cords, preferably to another wall.
- Recliners have been involved in entrapment injuries.
