

PREVENTING SUFFOCATION AND STRANGULATION IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death in young children. Many of these deaths could have been prevented.

Preventing accidents includes a three-way approach:

- Understanding the child's stage of development, skills, and behavior patterns.
- Improving the quality of care-taking and supervision.
- Safe-proofing the environment.

Developmental level, physical development, coordination, and intellectual development affect the way a child interacts with the environment. It is important to understand hazards as they relate to various age groups.

Infants

- Never tie anything around a baby's neck
- Do not use a drop-side crib! New laws enacted in June, 2011 prohibit the sale of drop-side cribs. A number of infant suffocation deaths have been linked to these cribs. It is illegal to sell drop-side cribs at garage sales or consignment stores, but everyone may not be of this law, so beware!
- Avoid hand-me-down, antique or garage sale cribs manufactured before 1974, even if they are not drop-side. This is the year crib safety standards went into effect. Cribs manufactured before that year may not be safe. If you choose a used crib, always check with the manufacturer for any recalls.
- Cribs should not have raised corner posts or finials. A child trying to climb out of a crib could get clothing caught, which can cause strangulation.
- Cribs should not have decorative cut outs on the head or foot boards. A baby's head could be trapped in these openings.

- Crib mattresses should fit tightly into the crib with no gaps that could entrap a baby's head.
- Keep soft toys and pillows out of the crib at this age. Crib bumpers are not recommended, but if you choose to use them, read and follow the manufacturer's directions very carefully.
- Sleep sacks or footed sleepers are preferable to blankets for an infant. If you use blankets, use lightweight types. Baby's feet should be at the end of the crib and the blanket should be no higher than the chest and should be tucked into the side of the crib. For more information on using blankets for babies, go to www.nichd.nih.gov.
- Do not allow your infant to sleep on a couch or waterbed or adult bed. These soft surfaces can trap baby's face and cause suffocation.
- Do not bring an infant in bed with you. Slipping under covers, between the bed and the wall, or being rolled on by an adult can cause suffocation.
- Do not sleep on a couch or in a chair while holding your baby. While the adult is sleeping, the baby can slip out of your arms, causing a suffocation hazard.
- Never tie toys or other objects across the crib bars.
- Necklaces, scarves, toys with long strings, etc. are a strangulation hazard.
- Hooded sweatshirts should not have strings. Never put a child to sleep wearing clothing with a hood, a bib, or any other item that could get tangled around the neck.

Toddlers

- Plastic bags, dry cleaning plastic, or plastic wrapping should be taken out of the house immediately and put in the trash can.
- Make sure cords from window blinds and drapes are out of children's reach or are secured in a safety device.
- Children's hooded sweatshirts and jackets should not have strings in the hood.

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- It is illegal to have an unused refrigerator unless the door has been removed or the latch has been disabled. Refrigerators are air-tight, and death can occur when curious children crawl inside and are unable to get out.
- Keep picnic/camping coolers and large plastic storage boxes out of children's reach. A curious young child can climb or fall inside, causing the lid to shut. A young child may not know how to open the lid. This sometimes happens during a game of hide and seek.
- Be aware of any furniture with rails, slats or spindles that are wide enough for a child's body to slip through, but small enough to entrap the head, causing strangulation.
- Balloons are considered to be one of the most dangerous toys in the United States. Keep them away from young children.
- Use caution with recliners. Children have suffocated when their heads become trapped between the chair and footrest.

Preschoolers

- Automatic garage doors have been known to pin a child, causing suffocation. Test your garage door regularly to make sure the sensor is working. As an added precaution, keep children away from the garage area.
- Watch out for small, confined, air-tight containers like trunks, picnic-coolers and large plastic storage boxes. Curious children can climb in during a game of hide-and-seek without realizing the danger.
- Check playground equipment for small spaces that could cause neck entrapment.
- Climbing ropes on playground equipment should be anchored at the top and bottom, preventing a child from getting the rope around the neck and falling.
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For more parenting information,
contact the Family Life Education
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