



BLIND CORDS CAN KILL CHILDREN

BLIND CORD INFORMATION & SAFETY ADVICE FOR PARENTS, CARERS & PRACTITIONERS

The majority of parents and carers of children think about the potential risks posed to children in the home and ensure that action is taken to protect them from the risk of accidental injuries. You may, for example, use stair safety gates, plug covers and ensure your medicines and cleaning products are safely stored out of reach but **have you ever considered reducing the risk of strangulation from internal curtain or blind cords?**

Many people don't realise that these can be dangerous for babies and young children. A child can place their head in the loop created by the blind cord accidentally through crawling on the floor or by playing and when they try to sit down, move away or fall their airways are quickly cut off and they are unable to call out for help. Due to the often young age of the children they do not have the ability or strength to loosen the cord from their necks and these combined factors are leading to an increase in child deaths due to accidental strangulation.

Since 2004 three young children in Staffordshire have tragically died as a result of accidental strangulation through blind cords.

On 14th April 2004 a young child died when she became entangled in the looped cord of a window blind at her home in Lichfield, Staffordshire; she was aged 23 months old. In the short time her mother had left her to fetch some clothes from upstairs she had climbed up the back of a sofa onto a windowsill and had wrapped the cord of the window blind around her neck.

Her mother subsequently made a complaint to Consumer Services alleging that blinds with looped cords were unsafe and the Coroner at the inquest in May 2004 supported her concerns. As a result of this complaint and the recommendations made by the Coroner, a new BS EN Standard for blinds was introduced which contains a single clause regarding the safety of children. This standard states that a safety notice about the risk of strangulation to young children must be attached to all blinds and this is mandatory under the 1994 General Product Safety Regulations.

'Safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility'

In February 2010 a three year old boy from Lichfield named Harrison Joyce tragically died at home after becoming entangled in blind cords. Five days later Lillian Bagnall Lambe a baby girl aged 16 months from Stafford also died in a similar incident.

The post-mortem results confirmed that both Lillian and Harrison had died due to accidental strangulation. At the inquest on 27th May the Coroner Andrew Haigh called on the government to review existing safety regulations and to ban all blinds with looped cords.

Harrison's parents have started a campaign for a law in Harrison's name (Harrison's Law') which would ban the use of cords on blinds and curtains. They have since petitioned the previous government to cease the manufacture of loop corded blinds. The government responded by stating that the major concern was not banning the cords through regulation, but raising awareness of the dangers from the millions of blinds that already exist within family homes.

In the U.K. there have is estimated to be two deaths of children within this young age group every year from blind cord strangulation and many more near misses.

Remember that loops and cords do pose a significant risk to babies and young children and are common not just in our homes, but in other community and public buildings such as church and sports halls.

It can take just 20 seconds for a child to die from strangulation by a curtain or blind.

Who is at risk?

Children under the age of four are at greater risk as they tend to be more active and love to climb. A loss of balance or by them putting the cord around their neck in play can easily result in the blind cord becoming tangled around their neck. It can take just 20 seconds for a child to die from strangulation as they struggle to get free.

Babies who are crawling are also at risk of getting caught in long blind cords which are on the floor, as are babies who have their cots or play pens positioned near to windows where there are blind cords within their reach.

What can I do?

The deaths of other children may be avoided by parents, carers, practitioners working with children and persons responsible for public buildings taking simple action:

You can make the cord blinds safer in your home or establishment by;

'Safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility'

- **Cutting the cord short and tying the ends out of reach. This is the fastest and easiest way of making your blind cords safer;** or
- Cut the loop at the bottom of the loop to create 2 separate cords and then tie them securely out of reach;
- **Buy and install a safety device to secure blind cords;**
- Tie all cords or chains securely onto a hook or cleat and get into the habit of using them each time you open the curtains or blind;
- **Move your child's cot, bed, highchair or playpen away from a window blind;**
- Use an alternative adjustment such as a rod, particularly in a child's bedroom.
- **When buying new blinds look for ones with safety features.** All members of the British Blind & Shutter Association sell blinds which meet the new European Safety Standard. Please use the following link to obtain further information: BBSA; www.bbsa.org.uk.
- Remember that loops and cords from blinds do pose a significant risk to children are common not just in our homes but also in public & community buildings.

Further Information & Resources:

For further information on guidance on how to keep your children safe please use the following links to external sites:

The British Blind & Shutter Association (BBSA) and the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) have both produced booklets in respect of blind cord safety.

- BBSA: www.makeitsafe.org.uk shows parents how to reduce the risk;
- CAPT: <http://www.capt.org.uk/pdfs/nait.pdf> produces a picture based booklet for parents of toddlers illustrating dangers and offering practical solutions. This booklet is called '*Now I'm a toddler I can...*'
- RoSPA: <http://www.rospa.com/childsafety/default.aspx>
- NHS Direct also has some information on preventing choking and strangulation; go to: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Accidents-tochildren-in-the-home/Pages/How-to-preventaccidents.aspx

'Safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility'

- **NHS Direct have also produced a home video on home safety for you to watch. To view this click on the link below:**

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Accidents-to-children-in-the-home/Pages/introduction.aspx

- Go to Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board's web-site for further information on how to obtain posters, leaflets to raise public awareness about the risks associated with looped blind and curtain cords at: www.staffsscb.org.uk/blindcords

Keep them safe: Taking action now can prevent deaths