

Keep Children Safe at All Ages

Decorating your child's room is a fun and exciting time, but make sure your decorating inspirations are grounded in safety. Many parents mistakenly believe that window cords only pose a potential strangulation danger to newborns and infants who spend a great deal of time sleeping.

However, safety experts say that once a child reaches the age of three or four, parents need to be especially vigilant in restricting a child's access to window areas. It is not uncommon for accidents involving children of this age to occur during active play.

Curious toddlers and older children may climb onto low-standing furniture or bookcases, either to peek out a window or to use the window cord as a Tarzan-type swing. Some unknowingly spin in circles while holding onto a window cord, inadvertently winding the cord around themselves. Others pretend the cord is a necklace or cowboy lasso, which can tragically become a noose when the child jumps off the furniture or windowsill area to the floor.

Low-standing furniture placed near a window is of particular concern. Safety experts say toy chests, under-

the-window couches and bookshelves, beanbag chairs, large cachepots for indoor plants and computer towers all can serve as "hidden stepstools" that a young child might use to reach a window or window cords.

Parents focusing on the safety of their older children should also decorate with safety in mind for baby's room. Areas such as cribs and windows are often the focus of decorating ideas for nurseries. Parents should be particular in selecting these products as they can pose hidden hazards to a baby's safety.

Crib and cradle slats should be no more than 2-3/8 inches apart, and the crib itself should be sturdy, in good repair, and with a mattress that fits snugly. Avoid placing fluffy comforters or pillows in the crib, where they might accidentally smother a baby.

Always place the crib away from any windows in the room, preferably on another wall. Most reports of accidental window-cord strangulations involve window cords within reach of an infant's crib or playpen.

Both the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the Window Covering Safety Council (WCSC) recommend that parents use cordless win-

dow coverings in children's bedrooms, as well as any room where a child regularly sleeps or plays. Parents are urged to move all low-standing furniture, cribs, and beds away from windows in any areas of the home where young children spend time.

New cordless window coverings and decorating solutions to match all budgets and decorating schemes make decorating for safety a breeze—from spring-loaded, no pull cord horizontal blinds and pleated shades to café curtains and roller shades. A simple cordless window covering in a neutral color, with a brightly patterned valence or topper to pick up the room's decorating scheme and color palette is a popular and practical solution to safely adding style to a nursery or toddler's room.

If you elect to use existing blinds, shades or draperies in the baby's room, make sure you check and retrofit for safety any corded window covering made before 2001. If you're not sure of the age of your blinds or drapes, check to make sure horizontal blinds and pleated shades are free from looped pull cords and are equipped with cord stops, and that the pull cords for draperies or vertical blinds are permanently attached to the floor or wall.

Free retrofit devices are available from the Window Covering Safety Council's Web site at www.windowcoverings.org, or by phoning their toll-free number at 1-800-506-4636. An illustrated guide to retrofitting older window coverings and a how-to-video can also be accessed on the Web site.

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