

Keep Children Safe at all Ages

When it comes time to decorate a child's room, many parents mistakenly overlook the potential dangers that window cords can pose to older children. Some believe this potential danger only applies to newborns and infants. According to safety experts, however, once a child reaches the age of three or four, it is not uncommon for accidents to occur during active play. Parents need to be diligent in restricting children's access to window areas.

Curious toddlers 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 onto 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 cord. 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.

Where infants are concerned, additional precautions are necessary. 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 $2\frac{3}{8}$ 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 these objects 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 window coverings in children's bedrooms, as well as any room where a child regularly sleeps or plays.

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.