

Furniture Accidents Can Be Deadly. Here's How to Protect Your Children.

Max
Sheridan

VPN &
Identity
Theft
Protection
Expert

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5 MINUTE READ



When my two very active boys were young, we had our share of trips to the ER for stitches, X-rays, and casts. One of the accidents that remains lodged in my memory was my then-3-year-old's encounter with the sharp corner of a coffee table. (I didn't realize how much blood could pour out of a temple laceration!) During another incident, he pulled his dresser on top of himself, scaring me beyond words. Fortunately, he escaped without injury.

Not all families come out of accidents of this sort unscathed. Since 2000, 581 individuals have lost their lives from furniture tip-overs, many of them children. In addition, over the past 30 years, an average of 18,673 children each year in the U.S. have been treated in emergency departments for injuries due to tip-overs.^[1] Because awareness is the first step in prevention, we're here to inform you of the facts as well as provide expert tips for keeping your children safe.

How Tip-Overs Occur

Around 70 percent of tip-over accidents occur with children under the age of 6.^[1] In part, this could be due to the fact that very young children spend most of their time at home and around furniture and TVs. They are also curious, impulsive, and less aware of danger than older children. And when things become topsy-turvy, young children are not quick enough to avoid a piece of falling furniture or to lift the furniture if they become trapped.

Accidents occur when children climb on furniture to reach something they want, like a remote control or toy; use dresser drawers as steps; or pull or trip on an electric cord. Furniture is also at risk of tipping when it is not secure in the first place. For example, when a piece of furniture is on a sloping floor or carpeting, it is less sturdy than if it were on a wood floor. If it is top heavy, it is also more likely to tip. A TV that is placed on a dresser or other piece of furniture not designed to support it is also at risk of tipping.

Young children who are injured from tip-overs are also at a higher risk of more severe injuries than older children. Because they are shorter, younger children often suffer injuries to the head and neck, while older children often have lower-extremity injuries.

Did You Know? Another home decor item, window blinds, posed a big risk to kids before cords in the blinds were banned in 2017. Check to see if you are protected from these [11 hidden dangers for kids in and around the house](#).

Safety Standards

A Consumer Reports survey found that 96 percent of respondents believed manufacturers of home goods products costing over \$75, like dressers, are required to follow safety standards.^[2] However, while safety standards exist, they are voluntary and, many believe, not rigorous enough.

Two of the voluntary standards recommend that dressers not tip when all empty drawers are open or when one drawer or door is open with a 50-pound weight hanging from it. Not only do organizations like the American Association of Pediatricians and Parents Against Tip-Overs argue that these standards should be mandatory, but they argue that the standard should be 60 pounds, which represents the 95th percentile of weight for a child who is 72 months old.^[1]

Another standard recommends that a tip-restraint device that anchors the dresser to the wall be provided when the piece of furniture is sold. That one sounds like a no-brainer to me.

In 2016, The Consumer Product Safety Commission studied a sample of 61 dressers and found that only 51 percent complied with the safety standards. To address this problem, it launched a public education campaign called “Anchor It” to make people more aware of the tip-over hazard.

The federal government has even recognized the issue. In 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Stop Tip-Overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth Act, which would have made standards mandatory and required a 60-pound weight for stability testing. However, the U.S. Senate did not pass the bill.

Injury Prevention Tips for Parents

Without mandatory safety standards in place, it is especially important to [take child safety into your own hands](#). You have taken the first step by reading this article and becoming aware. Another important step, especially with dressers, is anchoring the piece of furniture to the wall. Many manufacturers include a tip-restraint device with their dressers. Unfortunately, without mandatory standards, as many as 30 percent of manufacturers do not include them. If you purchase a used dresser or buy from a manufacturer that does not provide an anchor, consider purchasing an anti-tip-over kit. They cost less than \$20 and can be installed in about 20 minutes.^[3]

In addition, take the following precautions when shopping for furniture, assembling it, and using it:

- Buy furniture with wide legs or solid bases.
- Install drawer stops on all dresser drawers to prevent them from being pulled out more than two-thirds of the way.
- Place any heavy items in the drawer closest to the floor.
- Avoid putting attractive items like a favorite toy or remote control on top of a piece of furniture that could topple.
- Don't use shelves or dressers as TV stands. Instead, wall mount your TV.
- Tuck cords away so that they can't be pulled on or tripped over.

Other Types of Accidents Involving Furniture

A dresser is not the only type of furniture that can be hazardous. Coffee tables can be a menace too. We all know that kids can be rough and tumble, and running into the sharp edge or corner of a table can do some damage. (In our case, wrestling with his older brother on the couch preceded my son's fall onto the coffee table.)

A few precautions will keep your toddler or preschooler safe from accidental collisions with a coffee table. Use foam pads along the edges and corners. One word of warning: Little hands and mouths like to pull the pads off of tables. And why not? Foam feels great on teething gums, and long-edged pads work great as swords! After our accident, I resorted to moving the coffee table out of harm's way until the kids were older. One mom I know refinished a family table that was circular and chopped down the center pedestal. Her toddler could then safely cruise in circles around the repurposed table.

Also, some coffee tables have glass inserts. A study published in the American Journal of Surgery estimated that 13,800 cases of glass-table-related injuries requiring trauma center care occurred between 2009 and 2015. Most of the victims were children under the age of 7 or adults in their early 20s.^[4]

If you do purchase a glass coffee table, be sure that the glass is tempered. Currently, tempered glass is required for doors but not for most furniture.

Pro Tip: Furniture is just one of many of your home's features to consider when childproofing. For a comprehensive checklist, read SafeHome.org's [Guide to Home Safety for Kids](#).

Final Words

One study revealed some good news: Tip-over accidents have been on the decline since 2010.^[1]

With awareness and safety precautions, the number of accidents related to furniture hopefully will continue to trend downward. Protect your own children from these accidents by adding our safety tips to your childproofing checklist.

And of course, continue educating yourself to help keep your children safe from furniture injuries and other hazards in and around the home.

Citations

SafeHome.org only uses high-quality sources to support the facts within our articles. Read our [editorial guidelines](#) to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

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