

Choking and Emergency Intervention:

This blog post serves as a refresher for all those working with children, and who may require further information on the steps to be taken if a child in their care is choking.

As Educators working with young children, the fear of a child choking whilst in our care is insurmountable. Children explore the world and their surroundings by placing items into their mouths. This conduct is a completely normal and explorative way in which a child will learn about their surroundings. Items such as coins, batteries and marbles are the most common choking hazards to a child as these items are just the perfect size to become lodged in a child's airway.

What is choking?

Choking occurs when a child's airway gets blocked by something, resulting in the child not being able to breath.

Anything smaller than a 10-cent coin can cause an airway blockage and be a choking risk for children.

Food, hard sweets, peanuts and marbles are the most common cause of choking. Blind cords, curtain cords should be made safe and fitted correctly. Blind cords should never be left dangling and should be fitted with a mechanism to prevent dangling. Clothing (e.g. ribbons and belts) are a serious strangulation risk to children and should never be included in the dress up area as a result.

Common Items Which Can Cause Choking

Food choking risks include:

- Nuts and seeds, including popcorn kernels. Although small these items can be aspirated (breathed in/inhaled)
- Hot dogs and sausages (cut into rounds)
- Pieces and bones of meat, including chicken or fish
- Hard foods like crackers and corn chips
- Lollies and marshmallows (marshmallows expand with heat, are sticky by nature and therefore pose a serious risk of getting stuck in a child's throat causing a risk of choking.)

- Unpeeled food like apples, nectarines, grapes, and tomatoes
- Fruit pips and stones (Nectarines, peaches etc).

Household choking risks include:

- Coins
- Small or button batteries (from a watch for example)
- Small magnets
- The tops of pens and markers
- Jewellery (earrings/ necklace pendants /beads)

Toy and toy part choking risks include:

- Plastic shapes
- Marbles
- The eyes of stuffed toys
- Small ping pong balls
- Uninflated or popped balloons/vinyl gloves

It is vitally important that all toys and equipment brought into a service are risk assessed prior to their distribution to children, particularly if the toy has been donated to the service from for example, a parent. This toy could be well used and as a result, its safety somewhat compromised.

Methods to Allay Choking Risks in a Child Care Service:

- Whole nuts and popcorn should not be included for consumption by any child attending a childcare service due to the risk of choking they pose.
- All fruit and vegetables must be quartered or halved, i.e. grapes, cherry tomatoes. Grapes should never be served whole or cut into rounds.
- RISK ASSESS, RISK ASSESS, RISK ASSESS!!! All toys and equipment should be risk assessed regularly to ensure that they are still fit for purpose and safe for child. Any piece of equipment or toy, that is defective or has hazardous small parts that may have become detached either through normal use, or that have broken off through rough use of the item, and that present a choking, breathing, or swallowing hazard to a child, should be removed from circulation. Strangulation hazards (straps, strings and cords from blinds, telephones, flexes from CD players, or wire chargers); should ALWAYS be stored away from

reach. Any small items for use in a sensory table for example should only be in use under strict supervision – and otherwise stored in an area inaccessible to child.

- The use of amber beads is prohibited.
- Children are not allowed to blow up balloons, suck on, or put balloons in their mouths, or have access to un-inflated or under-inflated balloons. Many services have opted to prohibit the use of balloons entirely due to the risk posed.
- Nappy sacks and all plastic bags, Ziplock bags are kept out of children's reach.



Tips to Help a Choking Child:

- If you can see the object, try to remove it. Don't poke blindly or repeatedly with your fingers. You could make things worse by pushing the object further in and making it harder to remove.
- If the child is coughing loudly, encourage them to carry on coughing to bring up what they're choking on and don't leave them.
- **If the child's coughing isn't effective (it's silent or they can't breathe in properly), shout for help immediately and decide whether they're still conscious.**
- **If the child is still conscious, but they're either not coughing or their coughing isn't effective, use back blows.**

Dealing With a Child Under 1 Who is Choking:

1. Sit down and lay the baby face down along your thigh or forearm, supporting their back and head with your hand.
2. Give up to 5 sharp back blows with the heel of 1 hand in the middle of the back between the shoulder blades.

Dealing with a Child Over 1 Years Who is Choking:

1. Ask the child: Are you choking? Can you breathe?
2. If the child cannot breathe, talk, or cough, stand or kneel behind the child. Start the Heimlich Manoeuvre by placing the flat thumb side of your fist between the child's navel and the breastbone. Be



sure to keep well away from the breastbone. Wrap your other hand around your fist and press upwards towards their stomach.

3. Keep doing this until the object pops out and the child starts to breathe again.
 4. If the child becomes unresponsive, gently lower them to the floor. Call for help and send someone to dial 999 or 112. Stay on the phone and listen carefully to the advice.
- Begin CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation).
 - If during CPR you can see the object, remove it with your fingers but do not place your fingers in the child's mouth if you cannot see the object.

If back blows do not relieve the choking and the baby or child is still conscious, give chest thrusts to infants under 1 year or abdominal thrusts to children over 1 year.

This will create an artificial cough, increasing pressure in the chest and help to dislodge the object.

Chest Thrusts for Children Under 1 Year

1. Lay babies face up along the length of your thighs.
2. Find the breastbone and place 2 fingers in the middle.
3. Give 5 sharp chest thrusts (pushes), compressing the chest by about a third.

Abdominal Thrusts for Children Over 1 Year

1. Stand or kneel behind the child. Place your arms under the child's arms and around their upper abdomen.
2. Clench your fist and place it between the navel and ribs.
3. Grasp this hand with your other hand and pull sharply inwards and upwards.
4. Repeat up to 5 times.
5. Make sure you don't apply pressure to the lower ribcage, as this may cause damage.

Following Chest or Abdominal Thrusts, Reassess:

1. If the object still isn't dislodged and the child's still conscious, continue the sequence of back blows and either chest or abdominal thrusts.
 2. Call out or send for help.
- Don't leave the child.

Call 999/112 if the blockage doesn't come out after trying back blows and either chest or abdominal thrusts. Keep trying this cycle until help arrives.

Even if the object has come out, get medical help. Part of the object might have been left behind, or your child might have been hurt by the procedure.

Assisting an Unconscious Child With Choking

1. If a choking child is, or becomes, unconscious, put them on a firm, flat surface, and shout for help.
2. Call 999/112, putting the phone on speakerphone so your hands are free.
 - Don't leave the child at any stage.
3. Open the child's mouth. If the object's clearly visible and you can grasp it easily, remove it.
4. Start CPR