

Preventing Choking in Young Children

Young children die each year due to choking. Many are injured in choking incidents. Be proactive! As a child care provider, you can take all necessary precautions to prevent such a tragedy from occurring at your facility.

What causes choking in young children? Food accounts for more than half of all choking episodes, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.* You probably know that *whole grapes and hot dogs* are common choking hazards. Be careful with these foods too: *nuts and seeds, sticky candy, peanut butter, popcorn*, as well as *chunks of cheese, meat and raw vegetables*. Even foods you would not normally suspect to be choking hazards, such as *beans or baked apples*, could be a potential risk. Children can choke on small objects like *buttons, small balls, marbles, balloons, small hair bows or barrettes, marker caps, magnets*.

How can you prevent choking incidents?

- Monitor children during feeding times to make sure they take small bites.
- Encourage children to chew food well before swallowing.
- Do not let children walk, run, play or lie down while eating.
- Prevent children from putting too much food in their mouths at one time.
- Never prop children's bottles as they can choke on the milk and/or vomit.
- Cut food into small bites no larger than ¼ inch for infants and ½ inch for toddlers.
- Provide toys to children within the recommended age range of the manufacturer.
- Make sure all accessible toys are appropriate for the *youngest* child in care.
- Make sure that older children don't give younger children unsafe food or toys.

Supervise children closely. When a child is choking, it is usually silent. The airway may be blocked completely and the child will not be able to make a sound to get help. If you're distracted by other tasks and not looking at a child, you won't know the child is in distress.

What would you do if a child in your care started to choke?

It can happen without warning and you will need to step into action without hesitation.

Be prepared. Stay calm. Act quickly. Call 911 immediately.

The 911 operator will talk you through the steps you need to take until emergency medical personnel arrive. If possible, have one adult call 911 while a second adult (preferably certified in CPR and First Aid) performs the Heimlich maneuver on the child.

Other proactive steps you can take: Review your facility's emergency medical care plan. Schedule staff so that while children are in care, every classroom has at least one person with current CPR and First Aid certification.

* **Want more information?** Visit [HealthyChildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) from the American Academy of Pediatrics to find information in both English and Spanish:

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Choking-Prevention.aspx>