

Nursery furniture and safe sleeping



The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2008

Bedtime for babies and children is often welcomed by parents as a time to relax, or at least a time to catch up! By setting up the nursery or bedroom with safety in mind, you will sleep soundly in the knowledge that your child is also peaceful, safe and secure. There are many aspects to safe sleeping to consider, for example nursery furniture to buy, setting up the nursery, heating the room during the colder months, whether to use a portable cot when travelling, or bunk beds as the children grow older.

Choosing nursery/bedroom furniture

General guidelines

Given the wide range of nursery furniture from which to choose, it can sometimes be overwhelming when trying to decide what to buy. Look for simple designs that incorporate safety features. There are Australian Standards that apply to the design and manufacture of most items. Always ask if the furniture meets these standards. The best choice is not always the most expensive.

Second hand furniture

Occasionally well meaning friends and relatives will offer furniture that they once used with their children – without any injury occurring. The furniture may be in good condition, however safety standards have improved over the years. While you may not wish to offend, it is essential to check the furniture before using. In general, the furniture needs to be solid and stable, have brakes or locking devices in good working order and there should be no rough surfaces, sharp edges, paint chips or parts that protrude, e.g. screws.

Warning: Remember- avoid buying, borrowing or accepting any second-hand products that lack mandatory labels and safety features. Using these products increases the risk to your child of serious injury and possibly death. Source 'Safe Products for your Baby' Consumer Affairs

Cots and mattresses

There is a mandatory Australian Standard that applies to household cots. Use a tape measure to check:

- The space between bars (50–95 mm).
- The distance between the base and top of the cot (at least 600mm).
- The space between the mattress and the sides and ends of the cot should be no more than 20mm.

The mattress should be firm. There are major risks with using ill-fitting and second hand mattresses in cots and portacots, as children can become trapped and suffocate. Pillows, doonas, cot bumpers and cot restraints should not be used.

Portable cots are only meant for short-term use. Check the locking devices and stability of the cot before use, especially second hand furniture.

Never make any alterations to cots.

Prams and strollers

Falls from prams and strollers are common.

Never leave a baby or child unattended or out of sight in a pram or stroller. These items should not replace a cot for sleeping.

In considering whether to buy a pram or stroller think about aspects such as weight, portability and ease of use. Check for the following safety features:

- A five point harness (combined crotch strap, waist belt and shoulder harness).
- A stable and solid frame.
- Easy to use and secure brakes.
- A secure frame locks if the pram/stroller folds up for the purpose of carrying.
- No gaps that can trap a child's head, fingers, arms or legs.

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Choosing nursery/ bedroom furniture (cont.)

High chairs

Wriggling, restless and climbing children often fall out of high chairs. A five-point harness (combined crotch strap, waist belt and shoulder harness) must be used at all times.

Supervision is important and the high chair needs to be positioned well away from benches and stoves. Look for the following safety features:

- A stable frame
- Secure locks, including locks on wheels or castors

Change tables

Some parents choose to change the baby on the floor. If you prefer a change table look for one that:

- Has a roll-off protection such as a child safety harness and raised sides and ends at least 100mm high.
- Has no gaps or spaces at the top of the table.
- Is stable and has secure locks.
- Is at a suitable working height for you.

Remember keep one hand on the child at all times.

Setting up the nursery

Most deaths that have occurred have been associated with cots. In addition to choosing a safe design:

- Position the cot well away from blind cords that can cause strangulation. Curtain rods (wands) are safer than blind cords. Alternatively, cut or tie a knot in blind cords so that they are well out of reach, at least 1600mm above the floor
- Never tie toys that have string or elastic, or balloons, to a cot. Ties, cords or strings can get caught around the neck and cause strangulation
- Do not overheat the room. Adequate nightwear and blankets will ensure that your baby is warm

Moving from cot to bed

When a child starts to climb out of the cot, it may be time to start shopping for a bed. In the meantime it is best to leave the cot sides down so that the child can easily get out, rather than climb and possibly fall out.

Choose a low to the floor bed. A spare mattress placed on the floor beside the bed to break a fall is a good idea until the child gets used to sleeping in the bed.

Bunk beds are not recommended for children under nine years of age. This is due to the number of serious injuries involving bunk beds and young children

For information about reducing the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and safe sleeping practices contact the SIDS organisation in your state.

Bunk beds

- Select a bunk bed that complies with the mandatory safety standard based on the AUST standard for bunk beds AS/NZS4220. Bunk beds supplied on or after 1st November 2002 must comply with the essential safety requirements of this standard. There may be a label or swing tag confirming compliance. If you are unsure, always check with the supplier.
- Bunk beds are not suitable for children under the age of six. Children are at risk of injury in a bunk bed up until they are nine years old. Many injuries occur when children fall from the top bunk while playing

Do not let children use bunk beds as a play area. Establish rules and ensure they are obeyed.

- Keep bunk beds away from ceiling fans. There should be at least two metres clearance between the bunk bed and ceiling fans or lights.
- Either allow a clear space greater than 230mm between the bedroom walls and the sides and ends of the bunk, or no space at all.

For further information contact:

Consumer Affairs Victoria
Telephone: 1300 558 181

www.consumer.vic.gov.au



For further information
about the Safety Centre
Telephone 9345 5085

www.rch.org.au/safetycentre

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