



## PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### Tipping point: anchor heavy furniture to avoid injury, death

While the dangers associated with furniture tipping over have been known for years, the problem continues to grow.

Every day, 40 children are taken to emergency departments because of injuries involving furniture tipping over, according to a study in the October 2009 issue of the journal *Clinical Pediatrics*.

Since 1990, an estimated 300 furniture-related deaths have been reported, mostly from televisions and dressers falling on children. Death can result from injury to the head or suffocation from the weight of the item on the child.

"I think of large pieces of furniture at home as a hidden hazard," said Gary A. Smith, M.D., Dr.P.H., FAAP, who co-wrote the study and chaired the American Academy of Pediatrics' Section on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention. "We buy furniture designed for adult convenience, knowing that kids are going to reach for things on top."

Television sets tipping over account for 47.4% of furniture tip-over injuries, the study reports.

"Most adults put the remote on top of the TV, thinking it's smart to keep it out of the kid's reach," said Dr. Smith, who directs the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio. However, more than one-quarter of these injuries are a result of children climbing and

pulling, suggesting that children often are injured while trying to get objects on top of tall furniture.

Children also pull out dresser drawers and use them as steps to climb to the top of furniture.

Securing all heavy furniture to a wall using L-brackets or straps can prevent such injuries, according to Dr. Smith.

"Just like we don't sell a car without a seat belt, we shouldn't sell furniture without a brace," Dr. Smith said. "The weight isn't a safety feature; it's not a reason to think furniture won't tip over because it's really an issue of center of gravity."

In addition to anchoring large furniture to walls, Dr. Smith recommends that parents:

- install drawer stops that prevent children from opening dressers more than two-thirds;
- place heavy items on lower shelves or drawers; and
- set televisions on low, wide bases.

— David Ma

