

Choking Prevention Skills

"I was terrified; I was really terrified."

It's an experience that still haunts Melissa and Jason Thorpe. When their daughter Jalese was one, she choked, and stopped breathing.

"We had just come from the doctor's office, and they'd put a Band-Aid on her finger."

"The Band-Aid came off, and Jalese ended up with the Band-Aid in her mouth."

"I turned to look at her, and she just looked very strange."

"And then she noticed that she was not breathing properly."

"I realized she was choking, and I took her out of the seat, and I flipped her over."

"And she started hitting her on the back."

Fortunately, Melissa knew what to do to prevent a tragedy. And she hopes her experience can serve as a wake-up call.

"I would highly recommend parents find a way to learn how to save their child in a situation like that."

"The main thing with babies that are choking, you have to be able to recognize it."

Michael Russo is an EMP/Paramedic who teaches CPR and choking prevention skills.

"There are very common things to look for. Turning red and blue. Trying to cough. Trying to cry, but no sound because they are obstructed. The main thing is recognizing this immediately."

Russo says, if you see any of these signs, take action right away: try to dislodge the object. If you can't in less than a minute, or your baby is unresponsive, call 911 with the child in your arms. Do not leave your baby. Now, immediately start the steps to clear the airway.

"Well, we do two different procedures: One is called 'five back slaps, 'and then we do five 'chest thrusts.'"

"First thing you want to position yourself with the infant. Grab your hand on the base of the bony part of the chin, the lower jaw. And then the baby goes on your forearm. You take your hands (he slaps the back 5 times). Five. If you hit their back with those five back slaps effectively, you can essentially pop it out of that airway, and since you hold them on an angle down, it'll roll right out. You hear a cry, and it's a beautiful thing."

If not, and the baby is still choking, move onto step two: chest thrusts.

"In one fluid motion, you'll grab the baby by the base of the skull. Go to your right arm or left arm, whichever one, just the complete opposite. Angle the baby's head downward again, and do five chest thrusts, just like CPR, with two finger technique, at the nipple line. One, two, three, four, five."

If the object does *not* dislodge, repeat the cycle: Five back-slaps, switch arms, then five chest thrusts. And between each of these cycles, open the baby's mouth and look for the object. But experts' caution: put your

Choking Prevention Skills

finger in the baby's mouth only if you see the object. Otherwise, you might accidentally push it deeper. Keep up the cycle until you've dislodged the object, or help arrives.

"The main thing is preventing that patient from going unresponsive. Once they do, you'll start CPR, but the goal is to prevent that from happening in the first place."

While every parent needs to know these skills, experts say it's just as important to take precautions, so you'll never have to use them.

"Children can choke on anything that's small, so we think of anything smaller than a D-size battery has a choking hazard for children. We have to be very, very vigilant."

Melissa Thorpe is very vigilant because her two younger children are at ages where they tend to put everything in their mouths.

"I'm afraid of them choking cause there's just so many hazards out there that we don't even think are hazards, but they can be."

Keeping choking hazards away from small children and knowing what to do if they do choke can help ensure what all parents want for their kids: a healthy and safe childhood.