

Seat Belt Entanglement

Seat belts save lives. It's a message we've all heard for years, and we believe it. It is true. However, there is potential risk to children in certain circumstances, when seat belt injuries can occur.

Knowing your vehicle's features and that of its seat belt system is important. Most seat belts have a locking mechanism that is activated when the seat belt is pulled all the way out from the retractor. This feature is designed for child seat installation. If the vehicle's Lower Anchors and Tether for Children (LATCH) system was used to install the car seat, your child may be able to reach the lap/shoulder belt and pull the remaining belt from the retractor. In instances when the locking feature activates, the child may become entangled and not be able to free him or herself.

This can also happen if the child is not properly restrained. For example, if the child is allowed to lie down or sleep on the vehicle seat instead of being in a sitting position, and properly restrained. Older children who are no longer in a child restraint system can become entangled by pulling a seat belt all the way out of the retractor, or by playing with an unused seat belt.

Unused seat belts near a baby or toddler in a car seat or a child in a booster seat could also be pulled out all the way, activating the locking mechanism. This means that as the seat belt slides back into the retractor, it can't be pulled out again. If the seat belt becomes looped around a child's head, neck or waist, injuries could occur. But this is preventable with a few easy steps.

Start by buckling any unused seat belts and pulling the shoulder portion of the belt all the way out, engaging the locking feature. Then feed the slack back into the retractor. This way the shoulder portion of the seat belt should not be able to be pulled back out without unbuckling it and allowing it to fully retract. Seat belts used for securing a car seat or booster seat should also be locked tight in the same manner.

Prevention Tips:

- Do not let children play in or around cars.
- Never leave a child unattended in or around a vehicle.
- Always ensure children are properly restrained.
- Teach children that seat belts are not toys.
- Be aware that some seat belts have a retractor that locks if pulled all the way out.
- If a child has an unused seat belt within reach,
 - ◆ buckle unused seat belts.
 - ◆ pull the seat belt out all the way to the end without yanking,
 - ◆ then, feed the excess webbing back into the retractor.
- If a child seat is installed with LATCH, consider completing the steps above after you install the child seat. Always consult your child seat and vehicle owner's manual for installation instructions.

If you have questions or need additional information, visit www.lexleeovertonlaw.com, email lexlee@lexleeovertonlaw.com or call 225.761.7272.