

Tragedy compels mother to become an advocate for crib safety regulation

Published: Tuesday, June 07, 2011, 7:33 AM



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Joyce Davis is the president of Keeping Babies Safe. The organization has donated cribs to the Somerset Hills YMCA in Basking Ridge.

Joyce Davis has devoted her life to helping spare parents the nightmare her family has had to live with for 10 years.

During a visit to Florida in 2000, Davis woke up one morning to find her 4-month-old son, Garret, had suffocated while asleep in his play yard. The baby became wedged between the added mattress and the vinyl side of the mesh crib.

The supplemental mattress — advertised as suitable for their brand of portable crib — posed a risk of suffocation, the family later learned. But the mattress had no such warning on its label.

“We couldn’t believe that this information was not available,” Davis said.

Since then, the Warren resident has been relentless in her quest to save babies, volunteering full time as president of Keeping Babies Safe, which advocates for more stringent consumer safety regulation laws.

Davis, 43, a mother of three, gets visibly moved when she speaks about her mission: helping families avoid the loss she has endured due to lack of crib safety information.

Keeping Babies Safe, which Davis co-founded in 2006 in California and New Jersey, educates new parents on sleep safety, lists product recall information and has donated hundreds of new cribs to day care centers and needy families throughout New Jersey. KBS has successfully lobbied for the ban of drop side cribs and for strengthening crib slats, for instance.

KeepingBabiesSafe.org strives to spread information such as no soft bedding, bumpers, or stuffed animals in the crib. The safest way for a baby to sleep is on his or her back in a bare crib with just a tight fitting sheet.

Parents should choose a firm mattress and make certain that they can only fit two fingers between the mattress and

the side of the crib, she said.

The advocacy has had an impact.

Davis and her family played a role in influencing lawmakers to mandate new crib safety laws designed by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The law goes into effect this month.

Manufacturers of cribs must meet the current standards or face mandatory recalls, significant fines and being put out of business.

"KBS worked integrally with the CPSC in representing the consumer's perspective in the new law," said California-based crib safety expert Jack Walsh, co-founder of KBS.

The government outlawed drop-side cribs in December after the deaths of more than 30 infants and toddlers in the past decade and millions of recalls. The CPSC banned the manufacture, sale and resale of the cribs, which have a side rail that moves up and down, allowing parents to more easily lift their child from the crib.

Detaching drop-side rails were associated with at least 32 infant suffocation and strangulation deaths since 2000, according to the CPSC. Additional deaths have occurred due to faulty or defective hardware.

"We wanted a national crib law passed," said Davis. "Believe it or not, there was none."

The new standard requires cribs to have fixed sides, and hotels and childcare centers also must conform, though those facilities would have a year to purchase new cribs.

Davis warns moms who are having their second or third child that reusing an older crib can be dangerous since safety standards have changed.

"I know people have an emotional attachment to cribs," she said. "They feel that if it was safe for their first child, why not use it for the second child? Second-hand cribs are the leading cause of death."

KBS, with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the CPSC, has also produced a video, "Safe Sleep for Babies," which can be viewed on the website and within hospital TV networks, including at Morristown Medical Center and Overlook Medical Center in Summit.

"I think she's one of the stereotypical people who had a terrible situation and she looked and said, 'How could I make it so nobody else goes through this,'" said Amy Gole, manager of parent education at Atlantic Health Systems. "It is an admirable effort."

Fighting for safer children's products and educating parents has become a family effort, with husband Rich helping, too.

Every year, KBS holds a charity run/walk at Harry Dunham Park in Basking Ridge. This year, the event will be on Oct. 2. Participants can sign up at the website. For every \$100 KBS raises, the group can donate a new crib to a

needy family.

Where a child sleeps and is left alone should meet the same scrutiny as other children's products, she said.

"There are laws about bike helmets and car seats. Cribs are the leading cause of death among all juvenile products. Parents need to stay vigilant and educated. Had I known that information, I never would have put my son in danger," she said.

Davis has helped educate day care workers and parents on safe sleep practices at the Somerset Hills YMCA in Basking Ridge and has donated new conforming cribs to the center, said director of public relations Andi Williams.

"We're in a fantastic position to be able to educate all families and you have to think somewhere along the line it's all because of little Joyce Davis that lives are going to be saved," Williams said. "When people have a tragedy they either go down with it or fight back and turn things around into something good for other people. She took this down to D.C. and made it into a national movement. It's quite, quite inspiring."

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