Teacher guidance

KS2 Choking

This guidance sheet is designed to support teachers who are new to teaching basic first aid, using our first aid resources. Before delivering any first aid skills, teachers must feel confident that they have the relevant knowledge and competency to safely teach the required techniques.

The content of this guide covers the causes of choking, how to recognise if somebody is choking, and how to treat a casualty who is choking. In addition, there is some further information that may be useful to support the successful delivery of our choking sessions.

Please note that due to the possibility that a casualty who is choking may become unresponsive and not breathing normally, it is advised that pupils are taught the basic life support topic prior to this session.

CAUSES

Choking is caused by food or other objects stuck in the mouth or throat. Choking is a leading cause of death in children, who have smaller airways, and are less likely to chew their food properly, or may place small objects such as toys into their mouths. When an object causes a blockage in the mouth or throat, this blocks the passage of air into the lungs. This means the body cannot receive oxygen, which is essential for human survival.

RECOGNITION

A casualty who is choking may present one or more of the following signs or symptoms:

- Unable to cough or speak
- Difficulty or absence of breathing
- Grasping at the neck or throat
- Pointing to the mouth or throat
- May become unresponsive
- Red, puffy face.

TREATMENT

Treatment for a choking casualty aims to clear the obstruction.

1. Ask the casualty **"Are you choking?"** If the person can respond verbally, they are not choking, or may only have a partial blockage of the airway
2. **Encourage the casualty to cough.** They may be able to clear the obstruction themselves by coughing and forcing it from the airway
3. Support the casualty with one hand while leaning them forwards. With the heel of your other hand give them up to **five sharp back blows** between their shoulder blades. After each back blow, visually check the casualty's mouth to see if the obstruction has cleared. If choking persists, go to step 4
4. Give up to **five abdominal thrusts.** Stand behind the casualty and place one hand in a clenched fist between their belly button and the bottom of their chest. With your other hand, grasp your fist and pull sharply inwards and upwards up to five times. Check their mouth after each abdominal thrust to see if the obstruction has cleared

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5. If the obstruction still has not cleared **dial 999 or 112** for emergency help
6. Continue the **cycle of back blows and abdominal thrusts** while waiting for help to arrive, or until the obstruction clears
7. If the casualty becomes unresponsive at any point during the procedure, open their airway and check for breathing:
   - If the casualty is breathing normally, this means the obstruction has cleared. **Place them in the recovery position** and continue to monitor breathing while waiting for help to arrive.
   - If the casualty is not breathing, **perform CPR**.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- If abdominal thrusts are given to a casualty who is choking, they must seek medical attention, even if the obstruction was cleared. The performance of an abdominal thrust can cause damage to internal organs
- It is extremely important to reinforce with pupils that they should **NEVER** perform back blows or abdominal thrusts on a casualty who is not choking. Abdominal thrusts are a movement that can cause damage to internal organs
- The treatment outlined above is appropriate for children and adults. The treatment for infants under one year old is adapted appropriately due to their size
- Pupils may talk about food "going down the wrong way." Although simplistic, this is technically correct. The trachea (windpipe) carries air from the mouth or nose down to the lungs. In proximity is the oesophagus, which carries food from the mouth down to the stomach. A small flap of cartilage called the epiglottis covers the top of the trachea, preventing food or objects from entering the lungs. Choking may occur if food inadvertently enters.