



CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND

FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION

CITATION: **Non-inquest findings into the death of S, a two year old boy**

TITLE OF COURT: Coroners Court

JURISDICTION: BRISBANE

DATE: 7/07/2022

FILE NO(s): 2020/2013

FINDINGS OF: Ainslie Kirkegaard, A/Coroner

CATCHWORDS: CORONERS: accidental child death, safety hazard, toppling furniture death and injury, freestanding top-heavy or unstable furniture, anchoring

S was a two year old boy who died in an outer metropolitan hospital emergency department on 15 May 2020.

His death was reported to the coroner because he died from traumatic injuries.

S lived with his parents, his older sister and his baby brother. He was a happy and healthy little boy who was known to be very adventurous and full of energy. He enjoyed playing on the children's swing set and cubby house at the family home.

S was at home with his parents and baby brother on the morning of 15 May 2020. Shortly before 9:15am, S was playing in the hallway while his father was giving the baby a bottle in the lounge room. His mother had not long returned home from dropping their daughter to kindy and had just entered the house into the kitchen. The parents both heard a loud bang from the hallway. They immediately ran to the hallway and found S lying on the tiled floor unresponsive beside a fallen hall table. The hall table was made from a large railway sleeper. His father immediately picked S up and commenced CPR while his mother phoned 000. Paramedics arrived within minutes. They observed bruising to the child's nose and the right temple. He was not breathing, his pupils were fixed and dilated, and his heart rate was very slow. S was transported urgently to the local hospital emergency department with resuscitation efforts continuing enroute. Unfortunately, despite continued resuscitation efforts in the emergency department S was unable to be revived

Officers from the Queensland Police Service Child Protection Investigation Unit attended the hospital and the family home and were satisfied there were no suspicious circumstances.

The table involved in this incident was a narrow hallway table made from a timber railway sleeper that had been mounted on two steel legs of the same width as the sleeper. The table was approximately one metre high and weighed approximately 70kg. The table was placed against, but not fixed or anchored to the wall. The couple had made the table themselves from a sleeper the father acquired from his workplace. There were framed photographs and a glass vase containing foliage displayed on the table.



Video footage recorded by police demonstrates the hall table was capable of being tipped over with limited input. The parents believed the table tipped over on S when he was trying to pull himself up via the steel legs. To their knowledge he had not tried to do this previously.

Autopsy revealed severe crush chest injuries which the pathologist considered caused the death. The nature and extent of the chest injuries were consistent with crush injuries from the hallway table falling onto the child's chest. While there were blunt force injuries to the head in the form of abrasions and bruises, there was no traumatic brain injury. Toxicological analysis detected no alcohol or other drugs.

As at May 2022, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission was aware of at least 28 deaths in Australia associated with toppling furniture since 2000 and estimates there are at least 900 injuries a year requiring medical treatment. Children under the age of five are particularly at risk and suffer the highest proportion of deaths and injuries from this cause in Australia, similar to in the United States of America.

The ACCC advised injury data shows that freestanding storage furniture such as chests of drawers, cupboards, wardrobes, storage units, bookshelves and entertainment units pose the greatest risk of toppling over resulting in injury or death. It notes the risk is most likely to occur when children attempt to climb furniture as the weight of a child standing on an open drawer or shelf shifts the centre of gravity forward.

Data provided by the Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit regarding Queensland emergency department presentations over the period January 2016 to June 2020 identifies tables (including desks and benches) as one of the most common furniture items involved in injury presentations in children aged 0-4 years. The majority of these presentations occurred when the table fell or landed on the child, or the child pulled the table onto themselves.

The ACCC explained the safety risk is due to a combination of design factors and consumer behaviours, noting recent consumer research conducted by CHOICE suggests many consumers do not appreciate the safety risks and are not provided with appropriate safety guidance or anchoring kits.

There is presently no mandatory safety standard or information standard relating to toppling furniture and televisions in Australia. There is however a voluntary standard (AS/NZS 4935-2009 and AS/NZS 4935-2009 AMDT 1) published by Standards Australia. These standards relate to "*Domestic furniture - Freestanding chests of drawers, wardrobes and bookshelves/bookcases - Determination of stability*". Consumer groups such as 'Kidsafe' also publish material providing information to parents on how to make their home environment safe, including prevention of top-heavy or unstable furniture from tipping over.

I note the [ACCC](#) is currently examining whether other measures are needed in addition to the voluntary standard.

Findings required by s.45

Identity of the deceased – [deidentified]

How he died – S died from traumatic injuries sustained when he was crushed by a heavy hallway table that toppled while he was playing at home. The table was a homemade piece of furniture that had not been anchored to the wall. The heartbreaking circumstances of this child's accidental death demonstrate the significant safety hazard unstable freestanding furniture poses to young children and the importance of taking steps to anchor

heavy or unstable furniture to the wall to prevent them from tipping over or toppling. This safety issue arises regardless of whether the furniture item is manufactured for commercial sale, acquired second hand or homemade.

Place of death – Local hospital emergency department
Date of death– 15/05/2020
Cause of death – 1(a) Crush chest injuries

I close the investigation.

Ainslie Kirkegaard
A/Coroner
CORONERS COURT OF QUEENSLAND
16 June 2022