

Choosing Safe Toys

With birthday celebrations and holidays always around the corner, a special toy always seems to be the best gift—in a child's eyes. But how do parents and caregivers know what toys are safe or if they are threatening?

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), any toy you buy for a child should match their physical, mental, and social skills.

The CPSC recommends that adults follow these safety guidelines when selecting toys:

- The toy should suit the age, skills, and abilities of the individual child.
- When picking out a toy, look for sturdy construction. When buying for a younger child there should not be small pieces; this could present a choking hazard.
- Avoid purchasing toys that propel or shoot objects.

Supervision

- Examine the child's toys regularly for sharp, broken, or jagged edges and possible missing pieces that could cause an accident. If there is something wrong with a toy, repair it immediately or toss away.
- Read and use all safety labels that are provided on the toy or its packaging.



- Make sure the child is playing safely, whether it is with blocks or riding a tricycle. Your child's safety is your job. After purchasing a toy, talk with your child about ground rules for playing with the toy and safety measures that should be taken.
- Storage is essential. If toys are not being used, store them where nobody will step on them or trip over them and cause an accident.
- A toy chest should have a lightweight lid that can be opened easily from within. Be sure there are ventilation holes. Watch out for sharp edges that could cut and hinges that could pinch. Attach rubber bumpers to the front corners of a toy chest so little fingers won't be caught by a slammed lid.

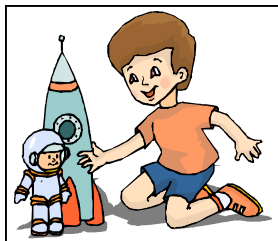
Safety Recalls

In the recent past, there have been numerous toy recalls. These dangerous toys were coated with lead paint or had lethal magnets attached to them. Parents and caregivers expect that when toys are on the shelf for purchase, they are safe. This just isn't true. James Swartz, of WATCH (World Against Toys Causing Harm), states that government oversight of the industry is so minimal that the toy makers' compliance with safety standards is basically on a honor system. Parents can't always count on the toy being safe just because it was made in the U.S. Brand names do not guarantee safety. These toys aren't always going to be the safer bet. Parents should always trust their instincts when it

comes to buying toys. If it looks cheaply made, chances are the small breakable parts, plastic rings, or even beads that a preschooler could pull off could result in a hazard. According to a study done in 2007, the U.S. toy recalls over the last 20 years indicated that 70 percent were due to design flaws, not manufacturing problems. Just because an item was made in the U.S. doesn't mean it has no parts made in other countries. According to a 2007 study of U.S. toy recalls, Chinese made toys are responsible for over 80 percent of toys recently being recalled.

Here are a few tips on how to choose safe toys:

- Change your mind set. Brand names aren't always the best solution.
- Always check for choking hazards. There could be warnings on the packaging label alerting parents. If there isn't a warning label, parents should still look over the toy to see if it's age appropriate.
- Exercise extra caution. When purchasing toys over the internet, retailers aren't required to post hazards of the toy on the net. Before purchasing a toy over the internet, log onto CPSC.gov for toy recalls or disadvantages of a particular toy.
- Loud toys are a potential threat as well. Prolonged play with a noisemaking toy can cause hearing loss over time. Always test the "Try Me Button" of a toy to hear the level of noise. Toys that can cause hearing problems are cap guns, talking dolls, vehicles with horns and sirens, walkie-talkies, musical instruments, and toys with cranks. Certain toy sirens and squeaky rubber toys can emit sounds of 90 decibels. These sounds can be as loud as a lawnmower and dangerous to a child's hearing.
- Avoid toys with sharp edges or blunt ends. Toys with smooth surfaces are ideal.



- Toys should have a label that indicates any toxic substances. If the toy has lead paint on it, it may harm your child's brain development.
- Toys with strings or cords 10 inches or less are safer. Anything longer may result in strangulation, choking, or having the string around any body part.

Preschoolers learn through play. Providing a preschooler with the best toys can boost growth within—physical, emotional, social, language, intellect, and creativity. Enhance learning activities by providing a variety of toys that emphasize language, large motor activity, and movement. Examples include puzzles and blocks, wheel toys and climbers, dramatic play acting and storytelling. Preschool age is also a great time to start introducing simple board games. Board games help preschoolers with their cognitive abilities, social skills, and fine motor skills.

For more information about toy safety, log onto the U.S. Consumer Product Safety website www.cpsc.gov or call the toll-free consumer hotline 800-638-2772.

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