



TOY(S) STORY A PEDIATRICIAN'S ADVICE ON TOY SAFETY

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It's the holiday time of year again. Time to decorate the tree, string the lights, mail the cards and shop for presents! The market is flooded with hundreds of new toys every year. The media exerts enormous pressure on parents and family members to buy the latest, most dazzling, and novel gadgetry for young children. Truthfully, it is often hard to resist the salesmanship! And if your children are anything like mine, nothing makes them happier than receiving that much longed for toy around the holidays.

While children's toys are by and large safe, the **2004 Trouble in Toyland report is the annual Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) survey on toy safety**. The study actually showed that the risks of toy related injuries and deaths remains unabated. Some risks posed by toys to children are obvious, while many are actually hidden even to the most vigilant parents' eyes.

When browsing for toys, keep the following tips in mind:

1. Is this toy **right** for my child's age, interest and level of maturity? A toy that interests your 6-year-old neighbor may not be best suited for your 4 year-old son.
2. Will this toy **choke** my child? Any toy or part of a toy that can fit into a **toilet paper roll** can potentially choke a child <3 years old. Kids love to put everything into their mouths. So learn to think like your child!
3. How **heavy** is this toy? A toy is no longer fun if it can fall on your child and hurt him.
4. Is it in good **shape**? Be careful when purchasing toys at **garage sales** or on auction sites such as **eBay** or when using hand me downs from older siblings and relatives. Ensure that pieces are not missing, loose etc.
5. Is this a good **quality** toy? Remember, you always get what you pay for. For example, a badly put together toy with small parts that can be easily chewed or yanked off is a choking hazard to a child.
6. Can that long **string** strangle my child? A cord longer than 12 inches can strangle a child's neck.



How can toys hurt your child? The top dangers lurking in those attractive toys are:

1. **Choking:** from small parts, rounded objects and balloons
2. **Strangulation:** From cords and elastics attached to toys
3. **Sharp edges and points:** From poorly constructed toys
4. **Projectile Objects:** Can act as missiles e.g., Beebe guns
5. **Deafening:** prolonged exposure to >85 decibels can cause hearing damage
6. **Toxic Chemicals:** Phthalates used to “plasticize” PVC, Xylene in nail polish etc
7. **Unsupervised Toys:** Electric or gasoline powered toys needing adult supervision
8. **Internet Bought Toys:** May not display appropriate safety & age appropriate guidelines



What's a Parent/Toy Shopper to Do?

- **Read labels:** Information such as age recommendations, choking hazards from small parts, “flame retardant or resistant” is usually posted on toys.
- **“Underwriters Laboratory”:** look for this approval sign on toys which have electric parts. Toys with heating elements are NOT recommended for kids < 8 years.
- **Store Toys Safely:** Toy chests should have a lid with spring loaded support and ventilation holes, and painted with non lead based paint.
- Check out **Consumer Product Safety Division (1800 638 CPSC available 24 hours)** www.cpsc.gov. But remember, the *CPSC does not test ALL toys available on the market.*
- The American Academy of Pediatrics www.aap.org has tips on Toy Safety and choosing age appropriate toys.

Have a safe, fun and toy filled holiday with your family!

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