

Concerned about toy safety? Consider alternatives

I'm starting to shop for children's toys for my nieces and nephews. What should I look for to make sure the items are safe?

This year more than ever, consumers are on guard when it comes to buying children's toys. With millions of toys being recalled because of toxins, lead paint, small detachable magnets and other hazards, safety is at the top of everyone's mind.

As you venture out into the front lines of the toy store world, be sure you're armed with good information. Before you go anywhere, check out the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's Web site (<http://www.cpsc.gov>) for any recently recalled products. Although those items should be off store shelves, it never hurts to be aware, just in case.

While you're there, review some of the commission's information on choosing age-appropriate toys and games for children. While some toys are perfectly safe and acceptable for older children, they can be dangerous in younger children's hands. For example, children age 3 or younger shouldn't have any toys with sharp edges or points, but older children may be able to safely handle such objects.

For a quick guide, go to the CSPC site and search for the one-page fact sheet, "Toy Safety Shopping Tips." For more detailed information, you can download two guides, "Which Toy for Which Child (0-5)" and "Which Toy for Which Child (6-12)." Those and other toy safety publications are listed at http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/toy_sfy.html.



As you consider what might be good gifts, it might also be a good idea to check with the children's parents about what they think would be appropriate. That will also help you avoid duplicating any items the children may already have.

You might even decide to avoid buying toys altogether, and choose one of these alternatives instead:

- Give them a gift certificate for a favorite water or theme park, and make plans to take them when the weather is right.
- Encourage physical activity by giving them a pedometer, jump rope, exercise band, exercise DVD, or even a gift certificate to a bowling alley.
- Offer to send them to camp next year. There are lots of options, including 4-H, scouts, sports, and YMCA.

- Consider pajamas, especially any associated with a favorite character or other theme.
- Find some new craft and art supplies, or educational (and fun) DVDs and CD-ROMs.
- Books are always a good option — traditional, electronic or even pre-loaded digital audio books — or a try a magazine subscription. For tips on choosing age-appropriate books, see Reading is Fundamental at <http://www.rif.org/parents/goodbooks/>. A gift certificate to a local bookstore is also a good choice.

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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Sharon Mader, associate professor and family and consumer sciences educator for OSU Extension in Sandusky County.

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