Choosing Safe Toys for Your Children

When a toy has undetected dangers, a child can sustain a serious injury in seconds. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimated that more than 250,000 toy-related injuries were treated in emergency departments in 2014 alone. Below are a few tips for choosing the safest toys for your little ones.

General Safety Guidelines:

- Toys made of fabric should be labeled as flame resistant or flame retardant.

- Stuffed toys should be washable.

- Painted toys should be covered with lead-free paint.

- Art materials should say nontoxic.

- Crayons and paints should say ASTM D-4236 on the package, which means that they have been evaluated by the American Society for Testing and Materials.

- Make sure a toy isn't too loud. The noise of some rattles, squeak toys, and musical or electronic toys can be as loud as a car horn and can contribute to hearing damage if held up directly to a child's ear.

Tips for Identifying Possible Dangers:

Assume the worst. Expect a child to use the toy in the most dangerous way possible and without supervision. Examine the toy to determine if a child can dismantle it and accidentally create new hazards.

Look for small parts. A child can swallow or choke on small items such as marbles, balloons, small parts from larger toys, and more.

Do the toilet paper test. Try to drop a toy through a toilet paper roll. If the toy falls freely, it is a potential choking hazard.

Use common sense. Toys that are safe for older children may be deadly for a baby, toddler or small child. Educate older children about the dangers to younger kids, and monitor children carefully.

Factors to Consider When Shopping:

Toys that look good to eat: Some toys are meant to look, smell or taste like food, which can invite a child to put the toy in his or her mouth.

Toys with cords or chains: Ropes, chains, strings, elastic bands and other cords – even when they are retractable – pose a risk of strangulation when they are long enough to encircle a child's neck.

Toys containing lead paint: Check labels on painted toys to see if they contain lead. Discard older painted toys that were manufactured before current lead standards were put in effect.

Flammable toys: The U.S. government flammability standards take into account children's clothes but not toys. Further, be particularly careful with regard to sleeping bags and comforters for camping.

Baby furniture and car seats: When borrowing or buying baby furniture such as cribs, high chairs, walkers, playpens, cradle swings and more, check for recalls and safety issues first.

Keep Toys Safe at Home:

After you've bought safe toys, it's also important to make sure kids know how to use them. The best way to do this is by supervising play. Playing with your kids teaches them how to play safely while having fun.

Parents should:

✔ Teach kids to put toys away.

✔ Check toys regularly to make sure that they aren't broken or unusable:

  • Wooden toys shouldn't have splinters.

  • Bikes and outdoor toys shouldn't have rust.

  • Stuffed toys shouldn't have broken seams or exposed removable parts.

✔ Throw away broken toys or repair them right away.

✔ Store outdoor toys when they're not in use so that they are not exposed to rain or snow.

✔ Keep toys clean. Some plastic toys can be cleaned in the dishwasher, but read the manufacturer's directions first. Also try mixing antibacterial soap or a mild dishwashing detergent with hot water in a spray bottle and use it to clean toys, rinsing them afterward.

Report Unsafe Toys:

Check the CPSC website for the latest information about toy recalls or call their hotline at (800) 638-CPSC to report a toy you think is unsafe. If you have any doubt about a toy's safety, don't allow your child to play with it.

You can also contact the products liability team at Anapol Weiss if your child sustained a toy-related injury. We can evaluate your situation and determine if the manufacturer, designer or installer is to blame.

Sources: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, KidsHeath.org