

Toys safer, but parents must be selective

Q. Several years ago you gave some safety tips for choosing toys. I cut it out for a friend. Now I have a grandchild, and she can't find the article. Can you repeat those suggestions? Thank you.

B.C., Birmingham



Terry Gibb

A. You must be thinking about holiday gifts — just around the corner. I tracked down the article and found the suggestions worth repeating: At the top of your gift list put: Think safety first! Every toy sold can be dangerous to some children.

Little kids can choke on little objects. Games labeled "for ages 4-7" may be fun for two-year-old David — he may even win the game. But he'll also put the small pieces in his mouth. In general, the industry is making safer toys, but parents still need to use good judgment and common sense.

Parents know the abilities of their children best. Be a label reader.

Age labels give indications as to what age group is likely to enjoy the toy. Some labels signal toy hazards. "Contains small parts" or "not intended for children under three" are good examples.

But labels seldom tell consumers what the hazards may be. So pay attention to label suggestions, but check the toy and use your good judgment.

If you shop for toy bargains at yard or garage sales and thrift shops, be especially cautious. Metal cars and trucks may have sharp edges. Dart sets with loose rubber tips

can — and have — put out a child's eye.

THESE TOY shopping tips are from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

• Don't buy a toy a child needs to "grow into." If a bicycle is too big now, he or she will fall and get hurt — now.

• Avoid toys with glass or fragile plastic that can break apart and expose cutting edges.

• Be alert for any toy with jagged edges, protrusions or rough edges.

• Avoid dolls or stuffed animals that have eyes or noses that pull off, sharp points, pins, metal prongs or the like.

• Ask whether the brightly colored markings or building blocks contain toxic lead paint, or if the cuddly stuffed chick "with real fur" is preserved with arsenic.

• Make sure all directions and instructions are clear to you. Ideally, they should be clear to the child, also. For example exploding caps say "Do no fire closer than one foot from the ear." If a child can't understand and follow this warning, don't buy the caps or cap gun.

• Keep in mind the child's age, interests and skill level.

• Look for quality design and construction in toys — not "bargains."

ONCE THE TOY is unwrapped,

remember:

• Toss out any plastic wrapping materials immediately, before they become deadly playthings and suffocate a youngster.

• Check toys periodically for breakage and potential hazards. Either fix them or throw them away.

• Younger children will always want to play with toys meant for their older brothers and sisters. Teach the older ones to store these items safely away.

• Don't attach cords or strings that can trip up young children or, worse, strangle them.

• If toys are stored in a toy chest, make sure that it has no heavy lid that can fall unexpectedly on a

child's neck or head. New chests have lid-supporters, older ones can be easily retrofitted.

• If toys are stored in plastic garbage cans bought for this purpose, drill holes in the sides and tops, so if a child should "hide" in it, he won't suffocate.

• Pass a copy of these reminders along to relatives and friends who buy toys for their children or yours — and have a safe holiday season.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to the Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit, Inc., One Kennedy Square, 4th Floor, Detroit, MI 48226.

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by
JUDITH A. BISHOP

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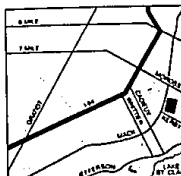
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