

4-H Consumer Judging Guide Toys



Toys bring a great deal of joy to children, and they also can be valuable learning tools. Exploring, pretending, and sharing are just a few of the important skills children develop when they play. Toys don't have to be expensive. A variety of toys for children exist. Some of them are safe and some

of them are dangerous. How do you know which is which? The main idea is to pick the right toy for a particular child at the right time.

Here are a few helpful suggestions related to purchasing toys in general.

Acceptable Toys	Unacceptable Toys
<p>Are safe. Any toy can be unsafe if given to the wrong child, to a child at the wrong age, or when it is misused. A child's safety depends on the types of toys selected, the way they are maintained, and the amount of safe handling taught and practiced in the home.</p>	<p>Are dangerous. Unsafe toys have sharp corners, edges, and protrusions; are flammable; have easily lost or broken parts; are painted with toxic paint; might give an electrical shock; use glass instead of plastic in toy vehicle windows; have detachable parts that can be put into mouth, ears, nose; have fluffy trimmings that can be pulled off and swallowed; or are stuffed with toxic or unclean materials.</p>
<p>Are durable. Toys are mauled, hugged, dropped, stood on, chewed on, washed and dried. They need to stand up to all this normal wear and tear.</p>	<p>Are poorly constructed. Do not have proper labeling.</p>
<p>Work like they're supposed to. Nothing causes loss of interest as readily as a toy that fails to perform. It often results in frustration, anger, and discouragement.</p>	<p>Cause anger or frustration by not working properly.</p>
<p>Are appropriate for the child's age. Toys should suit the physical, mental, and emotional abilities of the child. For example, an infant cannot play with a two-wheeled bicycle; a school-aged child does not need a mobile for a crib. Many toys can be used by children at different stages, like blocks and modeling dough.</p>	<p>Are too mature for a particular child related to their physical, mental, and emotional abilities.</p>
<p>Stimulate creativity. The toy can be used in several ways and leaves room for imagining and learning.</p>	<p>Have only one purpose and can be used only one way. Foster values the parents do not have. Cost too much.</p>
<p>Capture the child's interest and are fun. Children are drawn to appropriate toys and play with them spontaneously. Toys should reflect the child's interests.</p>	<p>Appear to contribute to misbehavior. They may stimulate too much excitement, aggression, or dangerous play.</p>
<p>Involve interaction with others. Encourages or even requires others like friends, siblings, or adults to play along.</p>	<p>Offer little chance of interaction. Wind-up or automated toys do not allow the child to be in control. The child merely becomes a passive observer of the toy's repetitive actions. These toys are often easily broken and irreparable, dangerous, and expensive.</p>
<p>Can be easily kept clean.</p>	<p>Cannot be cleaned with soap and water.</p>

Read the Label

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requires toy manufacturers to meet stringent safety standards and to label certain toys that could be a hazard for younger children. Look for labels that give age recommendations, and use that information as a guide. Labels on toys that state “not recommended for children under three...contains small parts,” are labeled that way because they may pose a choking hazard to children under three. Toys should be developmentally appropriate to suit the skills, abilities and interests of the child. Effective January 1, 1995, products that are manufactured in or imported into the United States must comply with the Child Safety Protection Act. Look for this symbol on toy packaging:

!/\ WARNING:
CHOKING HAZARD-with a description
of the actual hazard
Not for children under 3 yrs or
Adult Supervision Required

When purchasing art materials and supplies, including crayons and paint sets, look for the designation “**ASTM D-4236.**” This means the product has been reviewed by a toxicologist and, if necessary, labeled with cautionary information.

When purchasing electronic toys, look for the Underwriter’s Laboratories (UL) seal. This means the toy has been tested for safety. The labeling requirements specify that certain precautionary information should be listed on labels on children’s electrical products. The labeling is designed to help buyers choose the right toy for the right age and to warn the user of potential hazards. The package of every such product must carry a cautionary message and a minimum age recommendation. No item with a heating element may be recommended for children under 8 years of age. There are some hobby items, such as wood burning kits, that reach very high temperatures and have been exempted from certain maximum surface temperature regulations. These items cannot be recommended for, and should be kept out of reach of, children under 12 years of age.

Certain areas of electronic products must also be labeled:

- accessible surfaces that exceed certain specified temperatures must carry a warning of the danger

- toys with replaceable electric lights must carry a warning of the maximum safe wattage for a replacement bulb and a notice to disconnect the plug before changing the bulb
- products with non-replaceable lights will be so marked
- products not designed to be immersed in water must carry a notice to that effect

Storing and Caring for Toys

Toy safety involves choosing the right toy, checking it regularly for damage, and storing it safely. One of the greatest dangers in toy storage is the toy chest with a free-falling lid. Children are injured when the lid falls on their head, neck, or arms. Upright lids in trunks and footlockers pose this kind of hazard. Open chests or bins, chests with lightweight removable lids, or chests with sliding doors or panels do not present the hazard of a falling lid. Low, open shelves where toys can be reached easily and put away are a safer alternative and are often preferred by children. Caring properly for toys will extend their usefulness and avoid accidents and injuries. Don’t leave indoor toys outdoors overnight. Rain or dew could damage them, making them unsafe. Store toys in a special closet or shelf so they won’t be tripped over or broken. Train toddlers to put their toys away. Throw away broken toys; they are hazardous.

Think Toy Safety

More than 120,000 children are taken to hospital emergency rooms each year for treatment of toy-related injuries. Evaluate toys for your children from the standpoint of safety. The following are some guidelines:

- Choose toys appropriate to the child’s age. Some toys intended for children more than three years old may contain small parts, which could present a choking hazard for infants and toddlers.
- Toddlers should never play with any object that is smaller than a half dollar.
- Think BIG when selecting toys, especially for children under age 3. Big toys without small parts can be enjoyed by youngsters of different ages. Keep toys intended for older children, such as games with small pieces, marbles, or small balls, away from younger children.

- Keep uninflated balloons out of reach for children under age 6, and discard pieces of broken balloons because of the choking hazard.
- Explain and show your child the proper use of safety equipment such as bicycle helmets. Studies show that helmets can reduce severe injuries from a fall.
- Check all toys periodically for breakage and potential hazards. Damaged toys can be dangerous and should be repaired or thrown away immediately.
- Store toys safely. Teach children to put toys away so they are not tripping hazards. Periodically check toy boxes and shelves for safety. Visit the Web sites listed for more information.
- Some toys require adult supervision. Supervise children when playing with pull toys with long cords because a child could be strangled by the cord. Check toys with moving parts for safety. Make sure the child is mature enough for the toy.
- Follow instructions carefully and supervise children using any electronic toys. Failure to follow manufacturer's instructions may result in injury.
- Give outdoor play equipment and toys such as gym sets, skates and bikes to children old enough to use them safely.
- Teach children not to use bicycles, tricycles, or sleds where there is traffic and to use them carefully in areas where other children play.
- Have children take off roller skates or in-line skates before crossing the street. They should always wear a helmet and other safety gear.

Age-Appropriate Toys

There are many toys to choose from, but most can be grouped into specific developmental categories: physical or muscle; sensory (sight, sound, hearing, touch); social; and intellectual or creative development. Finding age-appropriate toys for children enables them to grow and develop at a level suitable for them. Refer to the table on the next two pages for information on which toys are best for which ages.

Web Resources for More Information on Selecting Toys

American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www.aap.org/>

Toy Manufacturers of America
<http://www.toytma.org/consumer/parents/safety/4toysafety.html>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
<http://www.cpsc.gov>

References

Understanding Children – Toys, by Lesia Oesterreich, Iowa State University, University Extension

Buying Age Appropriate Toys, The Neblin, University of Nebraska, Cooperative Extension



U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

- *Child Safety Protection Act Fact Sheet*
- *The Dangers of Electric Toys*
- *Toy Safety Shopping Tips*

Age-Appropriate Toys

Age	Toys to Choose	Toys to Avoid	Age	Toys to Choose	Toys to Avoid
<p>Newborn to 1 year</p> <p>Age of Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need toys with bright colors and texture • Toys should be washable, unbreakable, and large enough so they won't be swallowed • Enjoy toys to look at, feel, chew on, and drop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brightly colored objects • Pictures within view but out of reach • Mobiles that have objects attached with cords less than 12" long • Unbreakable toys that rattle or squeak • Washable dolls or animals with embroidered eyes • Stacking ring cones • Tapes or CDs with gentle music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toys with parts smaller than 1¼ inches • Toys with sharp edges • Toys with detachable small parts • Toys with toxic paint • Toys with cords more than 12" long • Stuffed animals with glass or button eyes • Balloons • Flammable items 	<p>1 to 2 years</p> <p>Investigative Age</p> <p>Along with the items listed for infants, this age group also enjoys any item that can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stacked • poured • opened • closed • pushed • pulled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push and pull toys • Books with cloth or stiff pasteboard pages • Nonglass mirrors • Take-apart toys with large pieces • Blocks—foam, plastic, or cardboard • Nested boxes or cups • Musical and chime toys • Floating tub toys • Pounding and stacking toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small toys that can be swallowed • Toys with small removable parts • Stuffed animals with glass or button eyes • Toys with sharp edges • Flammable items
<p>2 to 3 years</p> <p>Explorative Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need "hands on" toys that require little coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play dough • Large crayons • Pegboards with large pieces • Low rocking horses • Sandbox toys • Soft balls of different sizes • Cars or wagons to push • Simple musical instruments • Simple dress-up items like hats, scarves, and shoes • Sturdy riding toys • Books that rhyme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toys with sharp edges • Toys with removable parts • Small objects such as beads, coins, or marbles • Electronic toys • Tricycles with seats more than 12" high • Riding toys • Flammable items 	<p>3 to 4 years</p> <p>Imitative Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn by doing • Becoming more social • Enjoy realistic toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolls with simple clothes • Balls, any size • Non-electrical trucks, trains • Building blocks • Toy telephone • Dress-up clothes • Sturdy tea sets • Plastic interlocking blocks • Blunt scissors • Play dough • Washable markers, large crayons • Sewing cards • Simple board games • Books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic toys • Flammable costumes • Toys with sharp edges or small, removable parts • Riding toys used in hilly or inclined driveways • Heavy toys



Age	Toys to Choose	Toys to Avoid	Age	Toys to Choose	Toys to Avoid
4 to 5 years Beginning of Creative Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy painting and drawing • Enjoy building • Are energetic and active in their play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building blocks • Simple construction sets • Modeling clay • Nonelectrical trains, battery-operated toys • Puppets and puppet theater • Finger paints • Stencils • Board and card games • Simple musical instruments • Small sports equipment • Books • Bicycles with 20" wheels and training wheels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic or oil-based paint sets • Flammable costumes or ones that can be easily tripped over • Kites made of aluminized polyester film • Electronic toys (unless battery-operated) • Shooting toys and darts with pointed tips • Fireworks of any kind 	6 to 8 years Beginning of Dexterity Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy activities with a finished product • Develop keen interest in sports • Better understanding of rules and enjoy playing with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction sets • Sled, roller skates • Sewing materials • Simple camera • Printing and stamp sets • Paints, colored pencils • Sketch pad • Kites • Battery-powered electronic toys • Jigsaw puzzles • Dominoes • Board games • Simple toy sets • Dolls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kites made of aluminized polyester film • Shooting toys and toys with loud noises like cap guns • Fireworks of any kind • Sharp-edged tools • Electronic toys that plug in • Bikes or skateboards without helmets 
8 to 12 years Specialization of Tastes and Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy many of the same types of toys as younger children with more complex activities • Can learn math and problem-solving skills through card and board games • Enjoy active and social toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hobby materials • Arts and crafts materials • Musical instruments • Sports equipment • Camping equipment • Construction sets • Electronic trains • Bicycles (26" wheels for children age 10 and older) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fireworks of any kind • Air rifles • Chemistry sets • Darts • Skateboards • Arrows 			

Acknowledgment to Mindy Turner, 4-H Youth Development Specialist, New Mexico State University, for the original manuscript.

Prepared by Laura J. Connerly, Instructor - Family Resource Management, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, lconnerly@uaex.edu.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture, and County Governments Cooperating

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.