

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

December is safe toys and gifts month. The holiday season is the time when scores of new toys are introduced via television commercials, store displays, and other media.

Purchasing age-appropriate toys helps ensure your

children's safety. One of the keys to buying safe toys is buying age-appropriate ones. The guidelines that follow will help you determine if the toy you're considering is appropriate for the child you have in mind.

Babies: Birth to 1 Year

To stimulate your baby's senses, select toys that are brightly colored, of various textures, nontoxic, and lightweight. The following toys are age-appropriate choices:

- ♦ books made of cloth, plastic, or cardboard, with large, colorful pictures
- ♦ large, chunky blocks made of plastic or wood
- ♦ rattles and squeeze toys that make a lot of noise and are brightly colored
- ♦ washable dolls or stuffed animals that are soft and cuddly

Toddlers: 1 to 3 Years

A toddler needs toys that will keep his or her curious mind busy as well as satisfy the need to imitate adults. Puzzles, nesting blocks, and other stacking or fitting-type toys, musical instruments, play furniture and appliances, and games that involve sorting are good choices for a toddler.

A kiddy car, wagon, or low tricycle usually is a hit with a child in this age group, though use of such a toy must be supervised carefully. These low, rolling vehicles are sometimes hard to see from the driver's seat of a car.

Avoid push- or pull-toys that have long strings. Do not buy toys that have sharp edges — inspect musical toys closely in this regard.

Preschoolers: 3 to 5 Years

Preschoolers are the masters of make-believe. They constantly create imaginary situations to act out the grown-up roles they observe around them. They need props to use in their re-enactments. For a preschooler, a play cash register and money; play food; and make-believe villages, forts, farms, gas stations, and the like are just the ticket.

Many preschoolers are fascinated with cars, trucks, planes, etc. and how they work. This is an appropriate age for a child to receive his or her first two-wheeled bicycle — provided that the bike has training wheels and the child has a helmet.

This is also an appropriate time to introduce board games, electronic toys, and word and matching games. These pastimes sharpen visualization and memory skills.

In addition to the toys already mentioned, consider these gifts for a preschooler:

- ♦ books
- ♦ blackboard and chalk, crayons, non-toxic paints, clay
- ♦ toy workbench and tools
- ♦ tea party set
- ♦ dress-up costumes

6- to 9-Year-Olds

This age group enjoys toys and games that help develop skills for social and solitary play. Fashion and career dolls for girls and action figures for boys enable children to experiment with different grown-up settings. Craft kits and model building allow children to touch and experiment with the world around them.

A larger bicycle, roller skates or roller blades, or other sporting equipment, along with appropriate protective gear, are gifts that help a child interact within a group or team atmosphere.

Many electronic games designed for this age group are more than educational. They help teach specific skills and concepts — skills with money

and currency, reading, and word association, for example. Some electronic games help children develop hand-eye coordination and the ability to enjoy competition.

Preteens: 9- to 12-Year-Olds

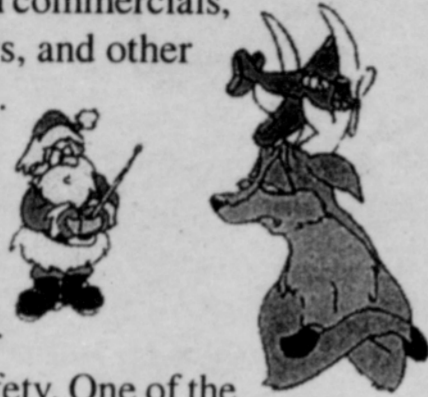
A preteen begins to develop specific skills and his or her lifelong interests. Advanced chemistry sets, advanced model kits, and advanced construction sets may be appropriate gifts for children in this age group. Physical play now focuses on team interaction, such as that found in various sports. Sports equipment can be popular with sports-minded 9- to 12-year-olds.

Video and other electronic games, especially those that require strategy decisions, are excellent choices. Books and tapes continue to serve as ways for pre-teens to learn. Crafts and musical instruments help them express themselves artistically.

Teens: 13- to 16-Year-Olds

During the teen years, a young person's interests begin to merge with those of adults. Electronic games and computer-based systems marketed as "family entertainment" have been developed to meet the interests of teens. Most teens are interested in challenging board games with themes that stimulate their interests.

During this time, many young people begin collections and collections of dolls, models, and stuffed animals are common. Books, tapes, crafts, and musical instruments usually remain popular.



Ambassadors Program Seeks Class of 2003-2004

The American Indian Ambassadors Program, a leadership development initiative for Native Americans, announces its recruitment for 2003-2004. The program seeks to:

- ♦ Rekindle dormant vision
- ♦ Refresh current leadership
- ♦ Empower emerging leaders
- ♦ Express cultural values in contemporary ways

The next class will be formed in 2003. Deadline for submitting applications is Dec. 15, 2002. The Ambassadors Program works through:

- ♦ Personal inquiry into one's own medicine
- ♦ Networks of contacts and resources
- ♦ Focused dialogue on current issues
- ♦ Exploration of international indigenous perspectives
- ♦ Interactive meetings with established leaders
- ♦ Community organizing

This program is open to Native Americans from the U.S. age 25 to 36. Contact:

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