

Eye-Friendly Toys For A Safe Holiday

By Dr. Christina M. Danley

The holidays are filled with anticipation of gifts and new toys. When making decisions for selecting new toys, parents need to tell Santa and loved ones to pick eye-safe and age appropriate toys for children.

So, in general, what toys should parents avoid? Toys with pointed, sharp or rough edges. Blocks are great for almost any age as long as corners and edges are blunted to reduce the risk of eye injury. Also, to avoid eye injuries, beware of long-handled toys, like mops, brooms, pony sticks and rakes. Check to make sure that they have rounded handles and watch closely children under 2 with such toys.

Be careful to avoid toys that may be age appropriate for an older child but could be dangerous for a younger child. Always supervise children in situations when they might share an inappropriate toy with a younger sibling.

While children may be asking Santa for the latest computer and video games, there are some tried and true toys which children love, are safe AND help your child build vital learning skills. If your child spends too much time on the computer or watching TV (see November 2010 Jonathan's Arrow article), he or she won't develop many of the underlying visual skills required for academic success.

Just as motor skills and cognitive skills require development, vision also requires development and can benefit from a variety of toys and activities. Developing a child's visual skills is critical to success during his school work. There are over 17 visual skills in addition to being able to see "20/20" that are vital to reading and learning.

This holiday season, you can help your child by looking for toys to help with:

- building eye-hand coordination

- shape and size discrimination (important for reading)
- general movement skills (for everything from writing to sports)
- space and distance judgments (crucial for driving and sports)
- left/right awareness (vital in avoiding reversals)
- visual thinking
- visualization
- visual memory skills (enable us to develop concepts)

Below are guidelines from the American



Optometric Association for certain types of toys and activities for different age children:

One-Year-Olds:

Bright balls; blocks; zippers; rocking horse; riding toys pushed with the feet

Two-Year-Olds:

Pencils, markers, crayons; bean bag/ring toss games; peg hammering toys; sorting shapes/size toys; puzzles; blocks.

3 to 6 Years:

Building toys with large snap-together components; stringing beads; puzzles; pegboards, crayons; finger paint; chalk; modeling clay; simple sewing cards; large balls; match-up-shape toys; tricycle; connect-the-dot games; sticker books/games.

For older children, here is a list of toys which not only are fun to play with, but they help develop some of the many visual skills that are critical to reading and learning:

Battleship Game (MB)
Chalkboard (24" x 36" min.)
Tinker Toy Set
Erector Set
Boy Scout Signal Set
Pegboard and Pegs
Coloring Books and Crayons
Dot-to-Dot Drawing Books
Jigsaw Puzzles
Twister (MB)
Building Blocks
Playskool Color Blocks
Indian Beads for Threading
Painting by Number
Playskool Parquetry Blocks
Models (car, airplane, etc.)
Card Games (Old Maid, etc.)
Dominoes
Lego
Lincoln Logs
Sewing Cards
Checkers
Tiddlywinks
Concentration (MB)
Ring Toss
Chinese Checkers
Finger Paints
Rush Hour Game
Action Darts Velcro board and Velcro coverwrd balls

Have a fun, safe, and healthy holiday season by encouraging your children to round out their activities with some of these tried and true games. If you find your child doesn't like these games, it could be a sign of a vision problem, in which case you should schedule an evaluation with a developmental optometrist. For more information on what a developmental optometrist is and how vision develops, you can visit <http://www.covd.org>.

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