Selecting safe holiday toys

The holidays are a wonderful time to spend with friends and family, and giving and receiving gifts is often part of the merriment. While it’s important to consider a child’s personality and interests when choosing gifts, it’s also important to consider whether the gift is a safe one.

Here are some tips for selecting safe gifts for kids:

✴ Choose age-appropriate toys. Most toy manufacturers include an age group recommendation on product packaging. In addition, traditional retailers often divide their toy displays into age groups, and online store search engines usually allow you to search for toys by age group, too.

✴ Be careful when buying toys or games for highly intelligent or precocious children. While these kids may be capable of reading and speaking at levels well beyond their peers, they may not have the maturity to safely use a toy designed for an older child or the physical mastery to use a toy as it is intended to be used safely.

✴ Consider younger siblings. If there is more than one child in the house, think about whether the toy is safe for every child, not just the recipient. Check packaging for safety warnings. If a toy or game presents a choking or injury hazard, choose a different one.

✴ Be cautious at dollar stores. Some advocacy groups report that dollar store toys do not follow all suggested safety standards and may sell toys that contain toxic chemicals. Toys that are cheaply made can break more easily; children can hurt themselves or choke on parts of broken toys.

✴ Include eye protection when buying toys that put eyes in jeopardy. The American Academy of Ophthalmology urges gift-givers to consider eye protection when purchasing certain kinds of sports equipment. A pair of protective sports goggles makes a great add-on gift.

Remember: Play is a child’s work. Gifts of toys and games not only make the holidays fun, they aid in the development of children’s minds and bodies.

Selecting gifts for children with special needs

Buying a gift for a child with a disability is in many ways the same as choosing a gift for any other child: You’ll want to select a gift that the child will find fun and interesting. The challenge often rests in selecting a toy that is safe and appropriate to the child’s abilities.

Here are some things to consider when choosing gifts:

Age group information on product packaging or in advertising may not be useful if choosing a gift for a child with a developmental disability. Also think about specific skills a child needs in order to enjoy a particular toy. Ask the child’s parents for suggestions so that you can select a toy or game that he or she can safely enjoy.

Children who have developmental delays may benefit from brightly colored, textured toys that provide sensory stimulation.

Kids who have motor control issues may find it easier to play with larger toys, such as large size blocks or Duplo Legos®.

Think through clothing purchases. Children with autism or sensory integration issues may find clothing tags and some fabrics irritating to their skin. Look for soft, natural fibers, and, if possible, choose apparel that have size and fabric care information printed directly on the inside of the garment. Children who have limited use of their hands or limited motor skills issues may find buttons, snaps and zippers difficult to manipulate. Look for pull-on garments for these kids.

Some retailers specialize in toys for children with special needs. Their salespeople are often good resources for identifying appropriate gifts.

If you’re a friend or relative who is planning to buy a gift for a child with special needs, it’s a good practice to double-check with a parent before making a purchase. Then you’re far more likely to choose something the child will enjoy and use.

Dear God, thank you for the gift of children in my life. Keep them—and their parents—healthy and safe. Amen