Keep toy safety top of mind this holiday season

By Jamie Wolf

We can certainly have plenty of fun without toys, but they do make the holidays merry and bright for the little ones in our lives. Unfortunately, inappropriate toys, or the unsafe use of toys, can seriously harm a child. This season, the Child Development Center (CDC) wants to remind our community about toy safety.

Children learn through play. Toys are learning tools. Playtime is the perfect time to practice imagination, sharing, language, and so much more. In this way, toys also encourage positive parent-child interaction, because children learn best from the people they know best. The Child Development Center recommends that you follow three general guidelines for toy safety.

1. **The right toy is for the right age:** Carefully read a toy’s labels and instructions to make sure it is safe for your child’s age and developmental level. You should also make sure that young children do not have access to toys meant for older kids. Make a habit of putting older kids’ toys away and either locked or out of reach of younger children. In CDC’s work with families, it is surprising how often we find out that a younger brother or sister has been hurt because they got a hold of an older sibling’s toy.

2. **Check for choking hazards:** According to 2015 data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), children age 5 and younger account for 35% of toy-related emergency visits. A leading cause is choking or asphyxiation on toys and toy parts. Again, making sure that the toy is appropriate for your child’s age is one way to avoid this danger. Regardless of the age on the toy label, you should still double check for small parts and pieces that a child could potentially remove and fit in their mouth. Batteries, especially button batteries, are particularly dangerous and often overlooked.

3. **Always use a helmet with riding toys:** Riding toys—including scooters, bikes, skateboards, snowboards, skis, and more—are the number one cause of toy-related injury and death for kids ages 15 and younger according to the CPSC. The most serious injuries are head injuries, which means helmets are a top priority. Other necessary equipment and safety precaution should also be used with riding toys.

We hope these safety tips will ensure that toys play a safe role in your child’s development. You can find more information about toy safety and other child-safety topics at safekids.org/safety-tips.

*Jamie Wolf writes on behalf of the Child Development Center, an organization serving families whose children have developmental delays or disabilities, and a member of the Safe Kids Missoula Coalition.*