

Tips to make parents better holiday shoppers

Special to Sentinel-Voice

DENVER — During the holiday season, stores are flooded with new and exciting toys.

So how do you know which toys to buy?

Children's World Learning Centers, a leading provider of early care and education in the United States, suggests parents use the following tips to make better shopping choices.

Educators agree that toys play a significant role in helping children develop important educational concepts and life skills. Good toys must entertain and occupy. In fact, one of the main values of a good toy is to extend a child's attention. The following toy shopping points should be considered before buying:

- Is the toy safe?
- Will the toy appeal to the child's personal likes and dislikes? Is this appeal based on the child's real interests or because a friend has the toy, or it was seen on TV?

- Is the toy durable and well built? Will it survive typical child use?

- Will the child be capable of enjoying the toy? Is it too simple or too complicated.

- Will the toy hold the child's interest over a period of time? Most toys are designed just to satisfy a child's initial interests.

The following are guidelines, provided by the Colorado Department of Health, Division of Laboratories, Toy Testing Laboratory.

- Choose toys with rounded edges and no points.

- Toys should be unbreakable and should be able to withstand use and abuse.

- Rattles and other toys for infants should be carefully checked for poor construction and parts that a child could swallow. Make sure that they cannot be opened by mistake or through normal use.

- Paints on all toys should be non-toxic and lead-free. Be sure also to check the materials used in stuffed toys.

- Follow package guidelines for age appropriateness to prevent getting a toy that is too complex for a child's age and development.

- Never hang toys with long strings, cords, loops or ribbons in cribs or playpens.

- Make sure materials on toys such as dolls, including clothing, etc., are flame retardant.

When determining whether a toy is appropriate for a child, always take the age of the child into consideration and whether the toy is developmentally appropriate.

For infants — birth to 12 months — select toys that cannot be easily swallowed and



Sentinel-Voice photos by Ramon Savoy

K-Mart became the North Pole for hundreds of children Saturday during the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's "Shop with a Cop" program. Cpt. Randy Oaks, left, and Lt. Alvin Morris of the corrections division worked as Santa's helpers during the 12th annual event.

do not have buttons or other detachable parts that could be swallowed.

Stuffed toys should be easily washable and made from soft, non-irritating materials.

Rattles, which stimulate an infant's oral, auditory and cognitive development, should be made by well-known companies, which follow recognized safety standards.

Mobiles, which hang over the infant, help stimulate their interest in visual images and movement, and develop tracking skills.

However, the moving objects projecting from the mobile should be kept out of the way of an infant's hands. Remember to take down the mobile at about six months, or when the child begins to sit

and pull up in the crib. Also remember the infant's view of the mobile is from underneath, so objects need to be three-dimensional or hang horizontally.

Toddlers — twelve to thirty-six months — are active and ready to explore. Among the many toys that help a toddler develop are:

- Dolls. They provide both boys and girls with the opportunity to express their emotional needs and strengthen a child's ability to socialize and communicate more effectively. Parents should select multi-cultural dolls.

- Blocks. They build a toddler's motor skills while exercising the imagination. Select lightweight materials and large sizes to match the

toddler's abilities at this age. Pictures and letters on blocks do not add to their value.

- Push and pull toys. These exercise a toddler's large motor development and coordination skills. They also teach cause and effect by showing the child an action that results from their input, teaching the child that he or she has some control over the environment.

- Large, light balls help to develop children's motor skills, while serving as a tool for simple games with an adult or another child.

Remember to avoid small pieces, as toddlers are still learning through tasting and could easily swallow or choke on something small.

Preschool children — 3 to 5 — enjoy "make believe,"

fantasy games and stories.

To maximize a child's fantasy activity, toys should have a general function (a playhouse, a stove, a truck), but not a specific, detailed function (an ice cream truck). Toys that allow a child to express his or her creativity include hand puppets, and the whole range of art supplies from finger paints to modeling clay, and crayons to felt pens.

Construction toys, which also come in many shapes and forms, teach children spatial relationships, eye-hand coordination skills and thinking skills.

Children 6 to 12 have improved motor, communication and social skills and grow immensely during these years. Toys that meet

their developmental needs include:

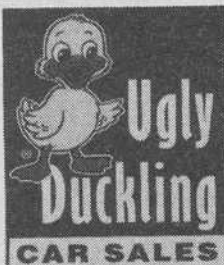

- Bicycles, which are excellent for improving motor skills, coordination and developing balance.

- Board games. They combine fun with learning to play games with rules.

- Musical instruments, which enhance the concepts of rhythm, sequence, repetition and love of music.

- Scientific and mechanical toys. These encourage children's natural interests in the real world and in figuring out how things work.

- Balls, including basketballs, tennis, soccer and rubber balls, and baseballs. These toys help to develop eye-hand coordination, social skills and muscle development.

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