

Child-safety expert offers tips for holiday gifts

December 22 2014, by Nora Dudley

Christmas is the most wonderful time of year, but it can quickly turn tragic if we're not careful, according to Bridget Boyd, MD, pediatric safety expert at Loyola University Health System.

"In our attempt to make Christmas extra special for our kids and grandkids, safety can get lost in the mix," said Dr. Boyd, an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Shopping for infants and toddlers can be difficult since many toys are labeled appropriate for ages 3 and up. Though it may limit the options, Dr. Boyd said age-appropriate guidelines are important for keeping kids safe.

"Age labels are monitored closely and should be taken seriously. Choking and strangulation hazards can mean life or death to a [child](#)," Dr. Boyd said. "Most people do follow the guideline to avoid small parts that might be choking hazards – but there are some safety tips that aren't as obvious."

When opening gifts, watch out for ribbons that could be a strangulation hazard and try to keep older children's gifts away from younger children so there is no accidental ingestion of a small part, Dr. Boyd suggested. Toys with strings - especially more than 12 inches long - are a choking hazard as well.

"If a child is under the age of 2, they are more than likely going to put whatever they are given in their mouth, so avoid items with paint, chemicals or [small parts](#)," Dr. Boyd said.

Small magnets and [button batteries](#) are some of the most dangerous items. Magnets should be kept away from small children as they cause serious injury or even death if ingested.

"Button batteries are extremely dangerous, so try to avoid gifts that include them. They also can be found in musical greeting cards, hearing aids and remote controls, so make sure to keep an eye on your child around those items," Dr. Boyd said. "Call your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately if a child has placed a button battery into their body – this includes swallowing as well as shoving the battery in the nose or the ear."

Still, gift-giving safety isn't just about swallowing hazards, it's also thinking about the entire well-being of a child.

"When thinking about what gift to give, try to find something that encourages the child to use their imagination and get up and get moving," Dr. Boyd said.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children spend no more than two hours in front of a screen a day. This includes video games, computers, phones and TVs.

"So many young kids want cell phones, but is that really the best gift to give a child? Think about what is age appropriate. There will be plenty of time to give phones and video games in the future," Dr. Boyd said.

If you do give an electronic gift, Boyd said supervision is key, especially if it involves the Internet.

"Unfortunately, online predators and online bullying are becoming more common and pose a very real risk to children. If your [children](#) do receive a computer for Christmas, make sure you supervise their Internet use. The best place for a computer is in the family room," Dr. Boyd said. "There should be no screens, including computers, TVs or phones in the room of a child or adolescent. Screen time can interfere with sleep as well as distract them from participating in healthier activities for body and mind."

It's also a good idea to periodically check a consumer website such as [recalls.gov](#) and [saferproducts.gov](#) to ensure gifts are safe and have not been recalled. She also suggested checking out the American Academy of Pediatrics website for more safety information.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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