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## **FINDING THE RIGHT TOY FOR THE RIGHT CHILD**

There are endless toys designed for children and at this time of year they all seem to cry out, "BUY ME"!

Are you aware of which ones are safe and which ones might be dangerous in the hands of a child? Consider these suggestions for selecting the **RIGHT TOY**, for the **RIGHT CHILD**, at the **RIGHT TIME**.

- Use the "recommended age" label as a guide, but keep in mind each child is unique in his/her abilities.
- Select toys the child can use today, not something for when he/she is older.
- Look for toys that allow for growth and can be used for a variety of activities over a long period of time. Examples include blocks, balls, art supplies, or a deck of cards.
- Take care when selecting toys for older children when younger ones are also in the home. Does the home environment provide a way to keep toys intended for older children out of the hands of those that are younger?
- Children under three years of age should not be given toys with small parts that could be swallowed or inhaled. This includes small balls, as well as uninflated balloons. Also avoid toys with sharp points and rough edges.
- Select toys that capture the child's interest, not the adult's. You should not have to coax, force, or trick a child into playing with a "good" toy.
- Look for toys that stimulate creativity. Does it teach a new skill? Provide opportunities for using one's imagination and problem solving?
- Electric toys with heating elements are only suitable for children over eight years of age. They should be used only when there is adult supervision.
- Beware of arrows, darts, swords, and other weapons. Purchase only those with blunt tips, plastic suction cups, or other protective points.
- Stuffed and cloth toys should be labeled "machine/surface washable". UL (Underwriters Laboratories) Approved should be indicated on electrical toys.
- If a toy needs batteries, include them with the gift. Children want to play with new toys immediately.

When you find toys that pass the "safety test", observe the child playing with the new toys. This is the only true test of age-readiness.

There is no substitute for adult supervision. Some children play more aggressively than others do. A toy may be safe in the hands of one child and not in the hands of another. Adults also need to watch for signs for wear. A broken piece could turn a safe toy into a dangerous weapon.

This holiday season make your toy selection carefully. The most popular toys may not be the most appropriate choice.