

Safe, or Not? What You Need to Know About Children's Outdoor Toys

With the recent spate of playground related injuries, parents are starting to become more aware of what is and isn't safe in an outdoor child toy. The sad thing is, hundreds of thousands of children are still injured each year in toy related incidents. So how can you make sure that your child is safe when he or she plays?

First of all, it's important to remember that it's impossible to keep a child completely safe during play, or any time, for that matter. Some bumps, bruises, scrapes and cuts have to be expected on the rocky road to growing up, and little injuries like that are good for children; they give them an idea of the world around them, and teach them what the laws of physics will and will not allow them to do. But with that said, no child should ever be hurt so badly while playing that he or she had to go to the emergency room. And the best way to keep that from happening is to know what's going on with your child, at all times.

However, it's equally important, especially with very young or very small children, that they play with toys that are suitable for their age unless you're right with them. It's one thing to hold a toddler on a bicycle seat and let him pretend he's riding it; it's quite another to let the same toddler clamber over the bicycle while it's lying on the ground and you're at the other end of the yard. Just as toast always lands butter side up when it falls, a child left on his own will get hurt if he possibly can. Check for small parts or sharp edges on any toy before you allow your child to play with it without you right over them. Mind you, I'm not saying that you should become a second shadow; if you have more than one kid, you won't be able to, anyway. I am saying that you should always be close by when your children are playing, and always make sure that the toys they're playing with won't be able to hurt them if you should turn your back for a few minutes.

Check labels. Most toys will come with warnings that say "3+" or "Not for children under four". Pay attention to those labels. Heed them. But don't just assume that because a label says "For ages three and up" and your child is four that the toy is automatically safe. Check for sharp edges. Check for places where curious little hands might get stuck. (The chain and gears on bicycles are particularly bad about that, for example.) Above all, be aware, and use common sense!

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About the Author

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