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Check Your Holiday Shopping List Twice for Safety

Wisconsin Optometric Association encourages parents to choose toys that protect children's vision and support healthy development.

MADISON, Wis. – The holiday season is one of the most popular times for families to purchase toys and games, many of which can support a child's visual development by strengthening skills such as eye tracking, focusing, and hand-eye coordination. At the same time, certain toys can pose serious risks to a child's eye health if not chosen carefully. The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) urges parents to keep safety in mind as they shop and to select gifts that are both engaging and developmentally appropriate.

"It really comes down to being proactive," says Dr. Rebecca Kabat, WOA President and Eau Claire optometrist. "Parents should watch for toys that could injure their children and consider gifts that are not only fun but also support healthy vision development."

Choosing Safe, Age-Appropriate Toys

The American Optometric Association (AOA) recommends selecting toys that are well-constructed and matched to a child's age and maturity level. Manufacturer age ranges are a helpful guide, but parents should also consider their child's individual development. Toys with projectiles or sharp components, such as slingshots, BB guns, dart guns, and arrows, carry the highest risk and are generally not recommended, especially in homes with younger siblings.

Be Mindful of Digital Devices

Video games and handheld electronic devices remain popular gift items, but extended screen use exposes children to high-energy blue light. Overexposure may contribute to poor focusing ability, increased nearsightedness, eye strain, and potential long-term risks such as age-related macular degeneration. The WOA encourages families to balance digital play with toys that promote active visual engagement.

Toys That Support Visual Development

Many traditional toys can help strengthen essential visual skills, including eye movement control, hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, shape and size discrimination, and visual memory. Examples include:

- **Ages 2 and under:** Bright mobiles, stuffed animals, activity gyms, blocks, balls, stacking toys, shape sorters, simple puzzles, and musical toys
- **Ages 3 to 6:** Large building toys, pegboards, crayons, finger paint, chalk, modeling clay, connect-the-dot activities, and matching games
- **Ages 7 and older:** Jump ropes, target games, advanced building sets, more complex puzzles, remote-controlled toys, and sorting games

Stay Informed About Toy Recalls

Some toys present safety hazards and may be recalled by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Parents can review current recalls and learn more about toy safety at www.cpsc.gov. "With thoughtful choices, parents can give gifts that inspire creativity, strengthen developing visual skills, and help children stay safe throughout the holiday season," Dr. Kabat adds.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.