

This factsheet presents background information mainly for people working with children and families, and students undertaking projects.

More advice on toy safety can be found in capt's leaflet *How safe are your child's toys?* written for parents and carers. A sample of this leaflet can be downloaded from capt's website www.capt.org.uk, where you can also find out how to purchase bulk supplies.

Child Accident Prevention Trust publishes a range of resources for parents, carers and older children, containing comprehensive safety advice. A complete list of these resources – leaflets, booklets, posters, guides, etc – can be found at www.capt.org.uk together with details of how to obtain them.

How many accidents are caused by toys?

Every year in the UK over 35,000 children under 15 go to hospital after an accident involving a toy. The majority of these accidents happen to toddlers between one and three years old.

The following toys are associated with particularly high numbers of accidental injuries:

- Toys that children ride on such as cars or rocking horses can cause cuts, bruises or fractures if children fall from them. Each year there are over 5,500 injuries caused by this type of toy.
- Toy boxes cause nearly 4,000 accidental injuries each year. Over 70 per cent of these accidents involve children between one and four years old.
- Model cars, planes and trains are also responsible for nearly 4,000 visits to A&E each year. Many of these accidents involve children under three and are caused by small parts in these toys.
- Soft toys such as teddies, dolls or action figures cause more than 1,500 accidents each year. As with other toys, it is the under three that are most at risk and small parts such as eyes, buttons or pieces of stuffing that cause many of these accidents.
- Toys that fire objects, such as toy guns or bows and arrows, water pistols, or catapults, cause over 1,000 accidents each year.

As well as accidents associated with the toys themselves, injuries also happen when children – and adults – trip on toys. The most serious of these accidents occur when toys are left on stairs or steps.

How can accidents involving toys be reduced?

It is very important to choose the right toy for the age of child. Most toys have a suggested age range on the packaging. These are mostly for guidance only and reflect what age groups the manufacturer believes will find the toy most appealing. A warning symbol telling you that a toy is not suitable for children under 36 months is important because it means that the toy may contain parts that could choke a very young child.

Only buy toys from reputable retailers, whether through shops or online.

It can be very difficult to tell whether a toy is a counterfeit or not – even though a toy may look genuine, counterfeits can have different chemical properties that may make them toxic or may break more easily than the real thing. If the price seems too good to be true, it probably is!

Most toys will conform to the European Standard EN 71. If this number is shown anywhere on the toy or the packaging it shows that the manufacturer is claiming compliance with this standard.

The Lion Mark can also be a helpful guide. Toys with the Lion Mark have been made to the highest standards of safety and quality and the mark is used by members of the British Toy and Hobby Association.

Toys may also carry a CE mark. This is a legal requirement for all toys sold in the European Union and is not a guarantee of quality or safety.

I am designing a toy for a school project – what do I need to consider?

Manufacturers use the European Standard EN 71 to make sure they meet agreed safety requirements. You may be able to get a copy of this document from your local reference library. The Standard comes in several parts and gives information on requirements such as materials, assembly, filling materials, packaging, sharp edges and resistance to flame. Visit <http://www.bsieducation.org/Education/14-19/topic-areas/toys/default.shtml> for further information.

You need to decide for what age of child your toy will be suitable. If the toy is for a child under three years old you will need to find out how to check for choking hazards. Be aware that small objects such as buttons or beads are not suitable for young children.

In addition to these basic requirements you will also need to think about the following:

- does the toy have moving parts? If so you need to make sure fingers will not be trapped in the mechanism
- are you using wood? If so you must make sure it is smooth and will not splinter
- will the toy have to bear a child's weight?
- are you using paint, varnish or other coatings? Make sure anything you use is designed for use with children and is non toxic
- does the toy have strings or straps? Think about whether the toy could pose a strangulation hazard for a young child.

It may be a good idea to go to a toy shop to look at how toys are designed and packaged to make them appealing to children. Remember also that children are likely to play with your toy in ways you had not expected. Watch children playing and see how they use the toys they have.

Further information

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For further information and advice on toy safety contact British Toy and Hobby Association, 80 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0EG. www.btha.co.uk

The statistics used in this factsheet are drawn from a number of sources. The government's Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System that collected information throughout the UK from 1978 was closed down in May 2003. The enquiry service will be maintained for 5 years. Enquiries should be directed to Information Centre, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Birmingham B5 7ST, email: infocentre@rospa.com, fax: 0121 248 2001, tel: 0121 248 2066.

Copies of the Annual Reports of the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System can be downloaded from www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk/CRDA/58/DD/1/detail.html. The reports for 1998 – 2002 inclusive can be downloaded from www.hassandlass.org.uk/query/reports.htm. Visit www.hassandlass.org.uk to interrogate the database for 200-2002 yourself.

Factsheets with detailed information on a variety of accident topics can be found on the Child Accident Prevention Trust website, www.capt.org.uk or can be provided by post on receipt of a stamped address envelope and a list of the subjects you require.

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