

Toys and Tot's Eyes:

Choose Safety

Does the phrase, "it's a wonder we ever survived childhood", ring true? If you're a parent who's watching your own brood careen through the "wonder years," it might ring especially true. Near misses and boo-boos abound when little ones are bouncing around the house, carefree, and many times, careless.

"Running with scissors" is an often-quoted child safety no-no. But parents might not think about safety concerns related to toys and tot's eyes. Choking hazard warnings are all over toy packaging. But there aren't many eye safety warnings. It's up to you to check out the toys your kids get, whether you buy them yourself or they're gifts from others. And, at holiday times and birthdays especially, don't let the fun get in the way of safety inspections.

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Indoors and playing
ball don't mix.”

We talked with a couple VSP doctors to get some more insight on eye safety and kids' toys. They've both had frantic parents and injured kids in their practices before.

For San Francisco Bay Area-based Matthew Bronge, O.D., the eye-injuring culprit he faced in his practice was not an inherently dangerous toy. It was just a ball, but his little patient was playing with it on a rainy day – in the house. In his case, it was the short distance the ball traveled before hitting him in the eye. The boy had a corneal abrasion that thankfully, healed quickly. The lesson: Indoors and playing ball don't mix.

Another doctor's experience was the classic "running with sharp toys" scenario. Chicago's Patricia Perez, O.D., treated a 6-year-old boy with a damaged cornea. His rambunctious younger brother accidentally pierced the older brother's eye with the pointed end of a toy. The injury healed, but along with it came scar tissue that blinded the little guy in that eye. A corneal transplant down the road will likely restore his sight.

But better to take pointed playthings from little hands than have to deal with the eye – and other bodily injuries – which can happen. Prevent Blindness America reports that injuries from toys account for about 11,000 cases of eye injuries each year, and half of them could be easily prevented.

Sure, most safety tips are common sense, but parents are busy today. Here are a few quick tips to remind you to spot and stop hazards before they start.

- **Flying objects.** Fun, sure. But think twice before letting kids play with the pointed type, like darts, arrows and others. And, firecrackers and BB guns are eye injury machines.
- **Labels.** Read them on toy packaging. They'll tell you the recommended ages so you can choose accordingly.
- **Sturdy with no points.** Look for these traits in toys, and then check them often for injury-causing wear and tear.
- **See ASTM on new toys?** That's good. It means they meet the safety standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials.
- **Labels on hobby kits.** This is really important. Chemicals and other substances can be especially damaging to eyes.
- **Store wisely.** Put them away when playtime is over.
- **Think young.** Pretend you're a little one and think of all the ways you could possibly injure yourself with a toy – then do something about it. Even better: Crawl around the floor and get a kid-size view of your house.
- **Get more info.** Go to KidsHealth, the nation's most visited Web site on child health and safety at: www.kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/safe_toys.html.