

Holiday Toy Buyers Take Notice

Watch Out For “Noisy Toys”

By Crystal Chalmers, Au.D.
Doctor of Audiology
Owner, North State Audiological Services

Each holiday season, millions of American parents, grandparents, uncles, nieces, other relatives, and family friends shop for and purchase toys for youngsters.

Yet while the toys are supposed to bring happy times and smiles to the faces of the children, many are designed by the manufacturer to be loud... and that is not a good thing. In fact some are so loud that they can cause permanent hearing damage after only a few minutes of exposure to a child.

How Loud Can Toys Really Be?

Just how loud can some children’s toys be? According to the Sight & Hearing Association – a nonprofit organization founded in 1939 with the goal of preventing needless loss of vision and hearing – there are a number of toys on the market that emit sound in excess of 90 decibels (dB) with some approaching 120 dB. For comparison, a chainsaw operates at 110dB!

To put that into perspective, 80 dB is the level at which hearing loss can occur from prolonged exposure to noise at this level. And the louder the sound, the less time it takes to cause damage. For example, a sound at 85 dB might take as long as eight hours to cause permanent hearing damage. Yet a sound at 100 dB can start causing permanent damage after only 15 minutes.

Children playing with noisy toys are especially vulnerable as their shorter arms causes them to hold the toys closer to their ears. And as we all know, teething children often mouth toys for long periods of times, placing the toys directly next to their ears.

Are There Any Regulations in Place?

While there are currently no federal regulations governing the noise volume toy manufacturers can use in their products, ASTM International (formerly the American Society for Testing and Materials) has set an acoustic standard that states that a hand-held, table top, or crib toy cannot exceed 90 dB 10 inches from the surface of the toy.

As compliance by toy manufacturers is voluntary, those purchasing toys need to be careful about their choices.

What Can You Do to Protect a Child?

As I'm sure no one – once learning the facts – would purposely want to harm a child, what can be done to both provide holiday toys *and* protect their hearing?

First and foremost, I'd recommend visiting the Sight and Hearing Association's (SHA) website at www.sightandhearing.org. Every year for the past twelve years they have done a study of noisy toys on the market. The group then lists this annual study on its website.

In addition to this research, the SHA offers the following tips:

- Listen to a toy before you buy it. If it sounds loud to you, it's too loud for a child.
- Report a loud toy. Call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at (800) 638-2772 or the SHA at (800) 992-0424
- Put masking or packing tape over the toy's speaker. This will help reduce the volume.
- Buy toys with volume controls.

Remember that noise induced hearing loss is something that can be prevented. So make this holiday season a happy joyous time for all, especially the child you are giving toys to ... because hearing is a wonderful gift!

About the writer: Crystal Chalmers, Au.D., is an AudigyCertified™ Doctor of Audiology, the owner of North State Audiological Services in Chico, and a member of AudigyGroup, the nation's largest member-owned association of independent hearing care professionals.

Since 2006, AudigyGroup has interviewed over 5,000 of the 18,000 audiologists in the United States, yet has selected only 250 to be members in this elite association. AudigyCertified™ is a trade-mark of AudigyGroup, LLC.

SIDENOTE:

Decibel Levels of Toys
From Sight & Hearing Association's 2009 "Noisy Toys Study"

<u>Toy</u>	<u>Recommended Age Group</u>	<u>dB Level Next to Ear</u>	<u>dB Level @ 10"</u>
1.) Iron Man Mobile HQs	4+ yrs.	119.5 dB	86.7 dB
2.) F-P Learning Letters Mailbox	6 -36 mos.	113.9 dB	91.5 dB
3.) Sesame St. Help Along Sing a Song	18+ mos.	112.1 dB	91.7 dB
4.) Black & Decker Junior Chainsaw	3+ yrs.	111.4 dB	89.4 dB
5.) LeapFrog Fridge Farm	12+ mos.	110.9 dB	84.0 dB