

*Toys designed to save children from the dangers  
of our own youth*

THE HOLIDAYS mean different things to different faiths and cultures, but only one thing to children everywhere: toys. It follows that we rearers of these multi-cultural kiddies have the exact same thing on our collective minds this season too, only our goals regarding these toys are different. In this age of helicopter parenting, heaven forbid may we purchase something that might potentially corrupt mind, body, or soul of our sacred offspring.

Like most of the current batch of parents, I risked my youth in an age free from today's fears: lead paint, allergenic ingredients, chemical pollutants, swallowing hazards. We were taught that our Creepy Crawlers Set made rubber bugs and burned fingers the old-fashioned way. We also seemed to know, without a warning label, not to randomly swallow things just because they happen to fit in our mouths. Chemistry sets contained actual chemicals—*imagine*—and most toys didn't play themselves while we passively watched. Our toys were primitive: various balls, skates, jump ropes, playing cards, crayons, finger paints, squirt guns, cap guns, water rockets, and board games without microprocessors.

For some reason we cannot allow our own children to experience these risks we all survived. Keeping our kids safe at all times is *de rigueur*, and parental protectionism must include psychological realms as well. Nowadays little Nate & Nan must not have their pint-sized egos challenged or their psyches ever be allowed to feel less than perfectly competent, otherwise how will they grow up to successfully manage corporations? Winning is everything and losing is for suckers. What could possibly be gained by having your child *lose* at a challenge, or not be able to succeed with only applying minor effort?

Obviously the marketplace understands the importance of our new parental paradigm and is keen to exploit it, as is demonstrated by these updates of the following familiar games, toys, and activities of our own youth:

**The vtech V.Reader vs. Actual Reading:** Buying one of these for your illiterate child is a two-fer—your kid doesn't ever need to actually learn to read to enjoy a good book and you'll never have to read to them. Those annoying words that pop up on the screen can be ignored like foreign subtitles on a movie while the perky cartoon voices and music do the work. Plus, it provides parents the guilt-assuaging "educational" label. An actual three-fer! It's not the olden days anymore where parents have to read bedtime stories and point to words while patiently waiting as their child struggles to grasp them.

**Mattel's Pictionary Card Game vs. Pictionary:** Nothing can be more humiliating to your children than to make drawings no one but they can comprehend. This new version of Pictionary assures them that they will never have to face that possibility. Why learn to doodle their own ideas and observations when they can simply use someone else's, say, one drawn by a

professional Mattel artist? (And what did learning to draw do for that guy except get him the lame job of drawing on these cards so we don't have to?)

**Crayola Beginnings Color Me A Song vs. Crayons and Butcher Paper:** "*The faster you scribble... the faster the song!*" the ad line on the box proclaims. Scribbling fast is very important, as this toy's musical behavior-reward system demonstrates. Drawing, like current manufacturing and business practices, is all about hastening the process and not caring about the end product. And your child will be encouraged to fine tune their scribbling skills so they can someday write like a doctor or a busy CEO.

**Any Electronic Gaming vs. Playing Out-of-Doors:** Virtual knees don't get skinned; even death can be undone by simply hitting "restart." No bee stings. No tracked-in dirt. No falling out of trees, getting lost in the woods, chipping teeth, being late for supper, or "getting into trouble." You'll always know where your kids are if you get them a Wii. Those dark circles around their eyes just show they're keenly focused. We're a push-button society now, so what could possibly better prepare your tykes for the real world than the virtual one?

**Activision's Guitar Hero vs. Music Lessons:** If your child can play like a rock star without years of practice and expensive music tutelage, what could be better? No groupies, drugs, or grasping agents to worry about either. Real musicianship is outmoded anyway, Millie Vanilli proved that. It's all about "attitude" now, which is exactly what Guitar Hero will give your little ones—heaps and heaps of it. And with all that attitude they'll conquer the world in no time flat, once they master those colored buttons.

I hope this list comes in handy as you shop. These manufacturers deserve our support. May my gift suggestions help you make your children's holidays merry—if not so bright.



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