



BEYOND BELIEF NETWORK

Beyond Belief Network Guides: Observe Safe Toys and Gifts Month

December is National Safe Toys and Gifts Month, a project led by [Prevent Blindness America](#). The group hopes to educate parents and other gift shoppers through awareness efforts all throughout the month. This guide contains information about selecting safe toys and event ideas. Because of Winter Solstice, Hanukkah, and Christmas, many groups do toy drives in December. So we've put together a guide to help you select toys for your December toy drive and ideas for collecting those toys. If you decide to do a toy drive, don't forget to submit a [report](#) telling us how it went. You can also email us for help!

Safe Toys statistics:

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, hospital emergency rooms treated an estimated 251,700 toy-related injuries in 2010 throughout the United States. 72% were to children under 15 years of age ([Health Tradition](#)).

Guidelines for choosing gifts for children:

- **Prevent injury:** Inspect all toys before purchasing. Avoid those that shoot or include parts that fly off. The toy should have no sharp edges or points and should be sturdy enough to withstand impact without breaking, being crushed, or being pulled apart easily. Look for labels that assure you the toys have passed a safety inspection – “ATSM” means the toy has met the American Society for Testing and Materials standards. Do **NOT** give toys with ropes and cords or heating elements.
- **Toys for children with special needs:** Choose toys that may appeal to different senses such as sound, movement, and texture; consider interactive toys to allow the child to play with others; and think about the size of the toy and the position a child would need to be in to play with it. Consult the [“AblePlay” website](#) for more information.
- **Avoid lead poisoning and exposure to toxins:** Check recall lists before giving toys that were purchased secondhand or new. Do not give children toys with paint that is chipped or peeling. When possible, choose toys made with nontoxic paints in the US. Do **NOT** give crayons, markers, or paints unless they are labeled “nontoxic.”
- **Choking hazards:** Do **NOT** give toys with small parts (including magnets and “button” batteries which can cause serious injury or death if ingested) to young children as they tend to put things in their mouths, increasing the risk of choking. *If the piece can fit inside a toilet paper roll, it is not appropriate for kids under age three.*
- **Encourage safety:** When giving sports equipment, include all necessary protective gear (e.g., give a helmet with a bicycle, include shin guards with a soccer ball, etc.)

Event ideas

1. Have a Family Fun-night Fundraiser! Host a Hot Cocoa and Holiday movie event. Instead of charging admission, require that each member bring a new, unwrapped toy. Be sure to pick a family friendly holiday movie so all family members can participate! If you have a space that you use to host speakers, all you need is a projector and a VCR/DVD player, hot water, and cocoa. You can have a bake sale, too.
2. Sell hot chocolate at a local store (check the store's policy first!) and use the donations to buy new toys.
3. Volunteer at your local Toys for Tots warehouse or Ronald McDonald house.
4. Adopt a family in need. Give them a hot holiday meal, and presents for each member of the family. Ask members to nominate families (including themselves). You can also direct them to Beyond Belief Network's [Helping Hands](#), a program to help needy nonbelievers find nonmonetary aid and community resources.
5. Encourage your members to get into the giving spirit by gathering all of the clothes, toys, and household goods that they haven't used in six months (or that they've outgrown), and make a large donation to your local [Goodwill Industries Donation location](#). [Goodwill](#) operates retail stores that make efforts to employ disabled people, those with criminal backgrounds, and veterans and offer job training for disadvantaged people. And unlike the Salvation Army, they don't discriminate based on religion or sexual orientation.

Additional Resources

- [Toys for Tots](#) is a U.S. Marine Corps Reserve charity that accepts new, unwrapped toys and distributes them to needy children at Christmas time. Most communities have [donation locations](#), and they also generally welcome volunteers, too.
- Women in shelters often have children. Some will accept toy donations. You can ask a shelter in [your area](#) what they need.
- [Ronald McDonald Houses](#), which provide temporary housing to families with children undergoing inpatient medical procedures, are also in need of toys (and food). They only accept new, non-handmade [toys](#). They're a great organization to volunteer for, too. To find a RMH in your area, go to the Ronald McDonald House [website](#).
- [Helping Hands](#) is a Beyond Belief Network initiative that provides help to nonbelievers who need aid. Encourage your members to nominate families in need, and their own family. We will coordinate with your group and the nominees to get them resources they need.
- [Goodwill](#) is only one charity that operates thrift stores. There might be others in your area that will accept your donations of used clothing, household goods, books, and toys. If you aren't sure if your local thrift store is a secular non-profit, let us look into them for you. Email us the name and address of the store at bbn@foundationbeyondbelief.org.