

Sibling equality

For parents who are extra careful to spend the same amount of money on gifts for each son or daughter, a study by University of Illinois researcher Laurie Kramer shows teens understand if a sibling is treated differently, as long as there's a good reason for it. Kramer told the story of a friend whose parents were so concerned about treating their five children alike that the siblings always

received the same sweater for Christmas. "Now, the kids may have thought that was fair - equal treatment and all that - but it didn't generate a lot of family warmth or a sense that their individuality was respected," she said. Kramer says that parents may feel closer or more comfortable with a particular child because their personalities complement each other. One sibling may require more attention

because of a learning disability. Kramer urges parents to be honest with themselves and figure out ways to connect with kids who may feel left out. "But you can't make things come out exactly the same, whether it's dollars spent on Christmas presents or minutes spent helping with homework," she said. "It's important to tell kids, 'It's our intention to be as equal and fair as we can be, but we're not always able to do that, and

it's not because we care more about one of you than the other.'" (CNS)
Age-appropriate toys for kids
Matching appropriate toys with a child's age is especially critical during the holiday season. One quick test, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, uses a toilet tissue roll. Any toy that fits through the roll

poses a possible choking risk for children younger than 3. Other guidelines compiled by the commission include:
■ Heed age recommendations.
■ For children younger than 3, avoid balls with a diameter smaller than 1 3/4 inches.
■ Avoid toys with sharp edges and points.
■ Avoid toys made with thin, brittle plastic that might break into small

pieces or leave jagged edges.
■ Toys with long cords or strings can become wrapped around a child's neck, causing strangulation.
■ If there is more than one child in the house, make sure toys for the older children are appropriate for the younger. For more safety tips, visit the commission's Web site at www.cpsc.gov. (CNS)
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