

Consider children when decorating

Safe Kids Kansas reminds parents and caregivers to take precautions when decorating for Christmas and other winter festivities. Holiday decorations, especially candles and electrical lighting, can be a fire hazard.

From 2004 to 2008, the National Fire Protection Agency estimated that decorations, excluding Christmas trees, were the item first ignited in an average of 1,170 home fires a year. Half of these fires occurred because the decoration was too

close to a heat source. Forty-five percent were started by candles, especially on Christmas, Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, Halloween and Dec. 23.

Pay attention to labels when choosing your lighting. "Decorative lighting should be labeled with the seal of an independent testing lab," says Cherie Sage of Safe Kids. "If it's not labeled for outdoor use, don't use it outdoors."

The agency said that Christmas trees, both natural and artificial,

were the item first ignited in about 240 report home fires a year from 2005 to 2009.

If you decorate a tree, here are some precautions.

- Never leave a lit Christmas tree or lighting display unattended. Inspect lights for exposed or frayed wires, loose connections and broken sockets. Do not overload extension cords or outlets and do not run an electrical cord under a rug.
- Natural Christmas trees always involve some risk of fire. To mini-

mize the risk, get a fresh tree and keep it watered. Do not put the tree within three feet of a fireplace, space heater, radiator or heat vent. LED lights burn cooler than incandescent lights and pose a lower risk of fire.

- Decorate with children in mind. Do not put ornaments that have small parts or metal hooks, or look like food or candy, on lower branches where small children can reach them. Trim protruding branches at or below a child's eye level, and keep lights out of reach.

- Do not burn Christmas tree branches, treat wood or wrapping paper in a fireplace.

- Never leave burning candles unattended. Don't put candles on a tree or near curtains or drapes. Keep matches and lighters locked out of reach. Battery-operated flameless candles are an alternative.

These tips may prevent accidental poisoning.

- Keep alcohol, including baking extracts, out of reach. Artificial snow spray are also harmful if inhaled.

- Holly berries, mistletoe berries, poinsettias, amaryllis, boxwood, Christmas rose, Crown of Thorns, English ivy and Jerusalem cherry are all potentially harmful if eaten. If a child eat any part of a non-food plant, call the Poison Control Center at (800) 222-1222.

For information, go to the Safe Kids Kansas website at www.safekids.org.

Let children believe in Santa as long as they want

When it comes to Santa Claus, a Kansas State University expert says let children believe in the jolly old elf as long as they want.

Jared Durtschi, an assistant professor in Kansas State University's marriage and family therapy program, says there is no particular age when a child should stop believing in Santa, and that children will often come to realize the truth gradually as they grow older.

"I don't think it's necessary for parents to decide upon a time to tell their children there is no Santa," Durtschi said. "As children develop, the magical thinking that is

so common in kids, which allows them to so readily accept all the details of Santa Claus, will give way and they will soon figure it out on their own."

Durtschi said that by telling the truth about Santa before a child has figured it out on his or her own, parents might unintentionally lessen the excitement of the Christmas season for their children.

"Christmas tends to be more fun for those kids who believe in Santa compared to those who do not," he said. "It may be unnecessary to spoil the excitement for the child until they outgrow the belief."

Parents should also be aware that children

will often go through a transition period where they still have some belief in Santa or want to believe in him, but their logic is beginning to tell them the idea is impossible.

During this period, which may last several years, Durtschi said that children's ideas about Santa can change often.

"They may believe one day, not believe the next day, and then decide they believe in Santa again next week after watching a Christmas movie," he said. "Just because a child is showing signs of doubt does not mean he or she has completely made the transition to disbelief in Santa."

This transition period often corresponds with the time that parents are wondering if their child still believes in Santa but are hesitant to raise the subject in case they spoil it for their child. Durtschi advises that parents ask their children a neutral, open-ended question -- "What do you think about Santa Claus?" -- rather than something more leading, such as, "Do you still believe in Santa?"

Parents who do not want their children to believe in Santa may find it difficult to teach them not to because the character is one the mainstream culture heavily promotes.

Durtschi suggests that these parents

may find it helpful to spend time with like-minded families during the holiday season, as children generally believe what they are taught from the adults around them.

Durtschi also said that whatever children are taught regarding Santa Claus, it is important for parents to teach them that there may be other children whose beliefs or opinions differ from their own.

"I hope all parents will make efforts to teach their children to respect the differences in how the holidays are celebrated," he said.

Publishers making it difficult to get E-books

Six major publishers are making it difficult, if not impossible, for libraries to purchase E-books. These same six publishers are responsible for publishing nearly all the bestsellers.

The State Library of Kansas has been at the front of the e-book conflicts, since State Librarian Jo Budler rejected a contract renewal from the E-book monopoly OverDrive, that would have increased costs nearly 700 percent. Since

then, Kansas has settled in nicely with alternative platforms that include 3M, OneClickDigital and the newly acquired Freading and Baker & Taylor. Now the dilemma seems to lie with six publishers, Hachette, Macmillan, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster and the newly merged Random House and Penguin Group.

In reaction to the restrictions and prices these publishers are placing on E-books in libraries, the State

Library launched a community Facebook page, www.facebook.com/thebig6books, bringing attention to the titles publishers are refusing to sell to libraries, price gouging or limiting checkouts per copy purchased. Budler is hopeful that this page will bring librarians and library users together and show that they are aware of the gaps on their digital shelves and are mindful of the publishers responsible.

"Writing to publishers and com-

plaining to each other about the publisher/library E-book conflict wasn't enough," said Budler. "We needed a platform of our own to come together with the public and really take a look at the content not available. It's really a missed opportunity for these publishers. Data indicates that libraries increase ebook buying business. Why are these publishers seeing this as a threat and not an opportunity? This is a gain-gain for all parties -- the

libraries, the publishers and the readers."

To help bring attention to titles affected by publisher's unwillingness to work with libraries, please visit and like www.facebook.com/thebig6books. For information on E-book lending in Kansas, visit your local library or go to www.kslib.info/digitalbooks.html.

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