

Experts Warn Parents AI Christmas Toys Put Kids at Risk

As parents scurry to complete Christmas shopping this year, children's and consumer advocacy groups are warning they should avoid artificial intelligence toys, citing safety concerns.

Fairplay, a nonprofit children's safety organization, issued an advisory last month urging gift givers to avoid buying AI toys for children this holiday season. The group says that the toys, which can be found in a range of plushies, dolls, action figures, and kids' robots, are generally powered by an AI model and have been shown to harm children and teenagers.



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"The serious harms that AI chatbots have inflicted on children are well-documented, including fostering obsessive use, having explicit sexual conversations, and encouraging unsafe behaviors, violence against others, and self-harm," Fairplay said.

According to a consumer alert report by the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), a test on four AI toys found that "some of these toys will talk in-depth about sexually explicit topics, will offer advice on where a child can find matches or knives, act dismayed when you say you have to leave, and have limited or no parental controls."

The "Trouble in Toyland" report also found that there are privacy concerns with owning these type of toys as they have the potential to collect data through methods such as facial recognition scans and recording a child's voice.

“They’re collecting their names, their dates of birth. All kinds of information – the kid’s likes, dislikes, favorite toys, favorite friends,” said Teresa Murray, co-author of the PIRG report and director of its consumer watchdog program, told NPR.

“They’re connected to the internet, so anything is available. Who knows what those toys might start talking to your children about with their friends or their friends’ parents or your neighborhood? I mean, it’s terrifying,” she said.

More than 150 organizations and individual experts signed the advisory issued by Fairplay, voicing concerns that the toys prey on children’s trust, disrupt children’s relationships, and hinder kids’ creative and learning activities.

“What’s different about young children is that their brains are being wired for the first time, and developmentally it is natural for them to be trustful, for them to seek relationships with kind and friendly characters,” said Rachel Franz, director of Fairplay’s Young Children Thrive Offline Program.

According to Common Sense Media, 72 percent of America’s teenagers say they have used chatbots as companions. And nearly one in eight have sought emotional or mental health support from them.

Dr. Anna Ord, Dean of Regent University’s School of Psychology, told CBN News recently that children and teens can easily become victims of technology.

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