

# family

## One more time?

How to avoid dangerous secondhand baby products

**Y**ou tell your family you're pregnant, and suddenly you have baby gear coming at you from every direction. Your elated mother promptly rolls out the charming crib or bassinet that you slept in and announces with proud excitement that your child will sleep in the same place you did. Your sister-in-law gleefully hands you all her old baby gear. And your well-meaning in-laws come home from a tag sale with everything you would ever think




to put on a registry. Is it safe to take all of these hand-me-downs? They certainly can save you lots of money. But they're not always a good idea. Below is a guide so you know when you can gratefully say yes and when you should gracefully say no thanks. (If they won't take no for an answer, show them this story!) Also check out the box on page 75 on shopping for used items, and always remember to go to [www.recalls.gov](http://www.recalls.gov) to see whether they're on the recall list.



**HAND-ME-DON'TS**  
Some used toys, car seats, cribs, strollers, and even clothing can pose safety risks.

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ITEM	WHEN HAND-ME-DOWNS ARE OK	WHEN THEY'RE NOT
<b>Bath products</b>	A used baby bathtub is probably fine as long as it isn't moldy and full of mildew. 	If a foam-lined baby bathtub smells of mildew or mold, say no thanks because they can be hard to remove. We strongly recommend not using bath seats, bath rings, or inflatable tubs that fit inside a regular bathtub because we consider them dangerous. Many children have drowned when using these seats.
<b>Car seats</b>	A car seat is OK if you know for sure it has never been in a crash; has all its original parts, labels, and instructions; and fits your car and child (test it because not every seat is a perfect fit).	If the car seat is more than six years old, pass on it because components of car seats can degrade and technology and standards change.
<b>Cribs</b>	The last major update to the voluntary safety standards for cribs was approved in April 1999, so if you get a crib that was made in 2000 or after (crib labels are required by law to post the manufacture date), you should be fine as long as none of the hardware, slats, or spindles are missing, broken, or loose. 	A crib made before 2000 might not be up to the latest safety standards, which include stronger rules on the integrity of the crib slats. So while Mom might press—"If it was good enough for you, why isn't it good enough for your child?"—you should probably say no. Avoid cribs that aren't working smoothly; have peeling or cracking paint, splinters, or rough edges; have cutouts in the headboard or footboard (which can entrap a baby's head); or have corner posts that are taller than one-sixteenth of an inch but less than 16 inches (anything in between is hazardous because a baby's clothing can get caught, which poses a strangulation risk).
<b>High chairs</b>	Say yes to a hand-me-down high chair if it has a five-point harness to prevent your child from climbing out and a fixed crotch post that prevents him from sliding out. 	Old-fashioned wooden high chairs with removable trays or arms that lift the tray over a baby's head are not always as comfortable for babies as newer form-fitting models. And many of them don't meet the latest voluntary safety standards, which require a harness and crotch post.
<b>Play yards</b>	The most recent major updates to voluntary safety standards for play yards were put in place in March 1999, so it's safe to assume that as long as the play yard was made after 2000, comes with its original tight-fitting mattress, and doesn't have dangling straps, your child should be fine.	If the play yard was made prior to when the new standards took effect, it could pose a safety hazard. Several play yards made before 2000 were recalled because side rails collapsed. Also avoid a play yard if the mesh holes are bigger than one-quarter inch, if there are any tears or punctures, or if it's missing its original mattress.

Look for manufacture dates on baby-product labels. These can help you avoid safety hazards.

ILLUSTRATIONS: AMY SAIDENS

ITEM	WHEN HAND-ME-DOWNS ARE OK	WHEN THEY'RE NOT
<b>Strollers</b>	If it was made after new standards were published in early 2007—which addressed such issues as stability, impact testing, and shoulder-strap safety—you can put your baby in a used stroller. 	If a stroller was made prior to 2007 or if it has broken, loose, or missing parts or a missing instruction manual, skip it. Also, take it for a test drive so you can judge the performance and sturdiness yourself. Say no if it doesn't feel stable.
<b>Toys</b>	Stuffed animals and most books make fine hand-me-downs, though soft toys should never be placed in a baby's crib (they're a suffocation hazard). If you're concerned about lead in a specific toy, home lead-testing kits such as Abotex Lead Inspector Lead Test Kit, \$13, First Alert Premium Lead Test Kit, \$17, and Homax LeadCheck Lead Test Kit, \$9, can be a good first line of defense. 	Avoid toys with chipping paint or cracks and any toys with small magnets or parts with magnets that could fall out. Steer clear of children's metal jewelry, charms, or key chains, which might contain lead. Also, watch for small parts that could pose a choking hazard. For children under 3, try the toilet-roll test. If the toy fits through the tube, it can be a choking hazard.
<b>Used clothing</b>	As long as buttons and snaps are on tight and none of the thread is unraveling from the fabric, used clothing is fine.	If the clothing has any drawstrings, forget it. Drawstrings are a strangulation hazard.

## What to ask before you buy used



**BABY BUYS**  
If you're shopping on eBay, be sure you know what you're buying.

If you're shopping for baby products at eBay and Craigslist, ask the seller the four questions below to make sure that the product can be used safely and has not been recalled. Many of the postings just say "jogging stroller" or "toddler bed," which does not give you the info you need to search the Recalls.gov database or figure out the age of the product, which is key to knowing whether or not it meets the most current industry or government safety standards.

- What's the model number? That information is always printed on the product. At the very least, ask for the brand name and the model name of the product.
- Does the seller still have the instruction manual?
- When was the product manufactured? (Again, that info should be on the label.) How long has it been used and by how many children? Did the seller buy it new (and if so, when) or was it a hand-me-down?
- Does it have all of its original parts and pieces?

MOM AND BABY: GEORGE DOYLE/STOCKBYTE/GETTY IMAGES