

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Winter Sledding Safety

To the child, the wintry weather means hours of fun, building snow forts, coasting down hills, soggy mittens and cold toes. But the winter wonderland often is filled with danger, especially for those who go sledding or tobogganing.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that over 50,000 persons received emergency room treatment for injuries related to sleds, toboggans and snow disks.

"Johnny was riding his snow disk down a very icy slope when he ran into a tree. He suffered a concussion."

"Anne was sledding on a lightweight plastic sled without runners when she was going to collide with another sledder. She was going fast and couldn't control or stop the sled. They collided, and Anne suffered a fatal cerebral contusion."

Accidents seem to occur for several reasons:

1. The sled, toboggan or disk has a mechanical or structural problem. Old sleds may splinter or break, or ropes may become lodged under a runner causing the sled to stop abruptly. Most disks cannot be stopped or steered except by leaning

the body from side to side or some sleds may have poor steering mechanisms.

2. Poor riding conditions exist. A new snowfall can hide ruts, rocks, tree stumps or branches. The unsuspecting rider can lose control and overturn. Icy conditions can cause loss of control while increasing the speed of the vehicle.
3. The sledder collides with a moving car, another sledder, or a stationary object. When selecting a sled, toboggan or disk, observe the following points:
 - * Check for sturdy construction. Avoid split or splintered wood and metal parts bent out of shape.
 - * Avoid equipment with sharp, jagged edges and protruding rivets.
 - * Choose a sled with a protective guard or bumper over the metal front bar to prevent cuts and other injuries in a collision.
 - * Check sleds for easy steering without jamming.
 - * Avoid sleds with runners that end in sharp-edged hooks. Runners that

curve continuously around to the top of the sled and connect with the side rails may be safer.

- ✳ Look for secure handholds and a place to tie on a rope.

Children need to learn good safety practices before using their snow vehicles. Parents should walk over the sliding territory before allowing a child to use it. Look for hidden rocks, stumps, bumps, bare spots, and ice.

- ✳ Young children need close adult supervision.
- ✳ Teach children not to push or shove or otherwise roughhouse while riding sleds, toboggans and snow disks.
- ✳ Children should learn how to safely roll sideways off a sled to lessen the chance of injury in a collision. They also need to learn how to stop the sled or toboggan or disk.
- ✳ Streets and traffic intersections are dangerous. Children should avoid these while playing in the snow.
- ✳ Check the ropes on the vehicle to make certain they will not become entangled in the runners.

A final word about maintaining the sled, toboggan, or disk.

- ✳ Dry off vehicles thoroughly before storing.

- ✳ Occasionally rub sled runners and other metal parts with candle wax to make them coast easily and keep them rust-free.
- ✳ Lubricate metal bolts, pivots and rivets with a drop or two of oil for rust-free use and easier steering.
- ✳ To protect against moisture, wax any wooden parts when you remove the vehicle from storage at the beginning of the season and again before you store it at the end of winter.
- ✳ Sand smooth any rough or splintered wooden parts.

With some caution and attention, parents can prevent winter sledding accidents. Children can learn to safely operate their sled, toboggan or snow disk. Winter play equipment needs our attention. Our children can have fun--safely!

Sources:

- "Before You Give Your Child Anything That Can Go Faster Than Your Child, Read This First." Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington D.C. 1978.*
- J. Van Horn, Family Sociology Extension Specialist, Pennsylvania State University, November, 1990. (PenPages)*