

## **Choosing Children's Chairs & Tables – Safety Considerations**

There is no doubt that children love their own special chairs. Their pride of possession and that feeling of having something especially for them shines in their eyes. Sitting in coffee shops and waiting areas one can see how children are drawn to the little tables and chairs put out for their use. Watching what they do with them and how they react over past years and has influenced my own choice and shaped my designs.

When choosing children's furniture safety is paramount. Parents will be aware that children can be brilliant at finding ways to injure themselves which they had not foreseen. Some are more gifted than others in this respect, my own daughter included.

There are regulations governing the design of most children's products but sadly there often has to be an accident first before a regulation to prevent it is written. Designers must always design for "use and foreseeable misuse" and should make sure their products pass all the safety regulations including cross over regulations for other products.

However children's chairs are often not designed especially for children but are a scaled down copy of an adult chair and can be dangerous. This was demonstrated when my daughter was given a child sized folding garden chair. Being very young she climbed into it knee first, leaning on the back of the chair for support. The lightweight chair tipped over backwards and I just caught her before she crashed face first onto the patio.

All chairs should be well made and all joints should be solid and not wobbly. There should be no protruding screws, these should be neatly countersunk and there should never be any screw covers. These little caps will come off and may present a choking hazard. Chairs, and tables, are more stable if legs angle slightly outwards. Table tops should have no sharp corners and should not extend too far beyond the legs in case a child leans heavily on one side or climbs onto the table.

With folding chairs, such as deckchairs, garden chairs and director's chairs, there should be no finger traps. Check that there is a separator at the folding joint to prevent little fingers getting trapped in the scissor movement. There should be no gap between the separator and the chair which is wide enough to nip the skin.

A particular passion of mine, rocking chairs, present the danger that the momentum generated will tip the chair over backwards. Ideally there should be a stop at each end of the rockers to stop the rocking motion. If there are no stops the rockers should extend beyond the profile of the chair and describe a shallow arc.

Chairs with arms should not be wider at the arms than the base of the chair. Children are active little bodies and it is not unusual for a child to turn in a chair and, leaning all it's weight on the arm, reach or lean over.

Upholstered chairs and bean bags should carry a label stating that all materials comply with the flammability regulations and contain no materials which give off noxious fumes.

Children will love their special tables and chairs and will want to keep them to pass on, with all their attendant memories, to their children. A woman told me how she had a little wooden chair in the shape of a duck which she kept for over 30 years because she couldn't bear to give it away. As one parent to another, be prepared to keep those special things – after all, didn't you want to keep something you loved?

*Zandra Johnson is the owner and creator of Fairytale Children's Furniture, founded in 2008 after she become frustrated at the lack of furniture designed specifically for children. Her aim has always been to create furniture that is designed for children whilst always making sure the product is safe and environmentally sound. These unique pieces of furniture can be viewed at [www.fairytalechildrensfurniture.co.uk](http://www.fairytalechildrensfurniture.co.uk)*

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