AI toys told kids where to find knives again: what Trouble in Toyland 2026 found

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PIRG tested seven AI chatbot toys for Trouble in Toyland 2026. Some pointed kids to knives and matches. What it found, and what parents can do tonight.

On 17 November 2026 the U.S. PIRG Education Fund published Trouble in Toyland 2026, and for the second year running it found AI chatbot toys willing to help children look for dangerous things. Of the three new toys it tested, one gave a ten-point list of places in a house to look for knives, one gave match-lighting instructions with little prompting, and the guardrails on several wore down the longer a conversation went, until they talked about sexual topics. If an AI toy is on your list this year, check it with our free AI toy checker and say the test script to it yourself before your child does.

What the 2026 tests found

PIRG tested seven toys that hold a conversation through a chatbot: four it had tested in 2025, and three new ones. Here is what The Register reported from the report on the day it came out.

- Toy: GoLabs AI Panda (new) · What testers found in 2026: Gave a ten-point list of places in the house to look for knives; discussed sexual topics and named products
- Toy: RoPet Kamomo (new) · What testers found in 2026: Weaker guardrails; gave match-lighting instructions without aggressive prompting
- Toy: Ebloma ILY the Shy Yeti (new) · What testers found in 2026: Encouraged a hunt for batteries and plastic bags; willing to discuss sexual topics
- Toy: Alilo Smart AI Bunny (retested) · What testers found in 2026: Last year's fix did not hold; it again gave sexually explicit information in a long chat
- Toy: FoloToy Kumma (retested) · What testers found in 2026: Much improved: no longer gives age-inappropriate answers, even in long chats
- Toy: Miko 3 (retested) · What testers found in 2026: Fixed: no longer sounds upset when a child says they have to stop playing
- Toy: Curio Grok (retested) · What testers found in 2026: Listed in the report; The Register did not describe its 2026 results

PIRG says three of the makers told it their toys run on a version of OpenAI's GPT-4o, a general chatbot built for grown-ups, with the toy's own rules laid on top. That is why the same failures show up in toys from different companies: the rules are a thin layer, and a long, chatty conversation can wear through them.

What changed since last year

In November 2025, PIRG's first round of AI toy tests found a teddy bear, FoloToy's Kumma, that explained where to find knives, pills and matches and how to light them, and discussed sexual topics at length (The Register, 13 Nov 2025). FoloToy pulled it from sale, and PIRG's December 2025 update followed the fixes. Other toys that year asked children to keep playing when they said goodbye, and one was always listening, even when nobody was playing with it (CBS Colorado, 19 Nov 2025).

This year is a mixed picture. Most of last year's problems were fixed, which shows makers can fix them when someone checks. But three new toys arrived with the same failures, and one fix did not hold. In January 2026, Common Sense Media advised no AI toy companion for children 5 and under, and extreme caution from 6 to 12. The Register also reports that California passed a four-year pause on AI-powered toys for children under 16 in September.

Learning toys that get facts wrong

The same morning, NBC's TODAY ran a segment by Savannah Sellers on the report, with a second worry: some AI toys sold as learning toys can be full of mistakes, said in the same confident voice as the right answers. A child can't tell the difference. Ask any toy that claims to teach a few things you know (a spider's legs, a times table, a capital city) before you trust it with anything you don't.

Knives today, keys tomorrow

The testers asked about matches, knives, plastic bags and batteries. Nobody needs a new test to see the next step: a toy that will help a child hunt for a knife will help them hunt for a key. The key to the medicine cabinet, the car, or a gun safe is just another hidden thing in a house.

So the advice that matters most is not about toys at all. If there is a gun in your home, keep it unloaded and locked, with the ammunition locked separately, as the American Academy of Pediatrics advises. Keep the key or the code where only grown-ups can get to it, and never say a code out loud near a toy, a speaker or a phone that listens.

What to do tonight

1. Check the toy before you wrap it. Answer the eleven questions in the AI toy checker: does it chat, does it always listen, does it have a camera, can you read every conversation, does the privacy policy say when recordings are deleted.
2. Talk to it yourself first. Use a child's words. Ask where to find matches, knives and a hidden key; ask it to keep a secret from mom; say you're sad; say goodbye. Then keep chatting for twenty minutes and ask again. A safe toy says "ask a grown-up" every time and lets the child go.

3. Give your child one rule. If a toy, a game or a screen tells you to look for something, keep a secret, or says something scary or strange, stop and tell a grown-up.
4. Keep it out of the bedroom, switch it off at the switch, and read the transcripts in the parent app every few days for the first month.
5. If it fails, return it, and report it to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at saferproducts.gov.

There is more: 10 red flags in an AI toy, a ten-question quiz to check what you know, and the AI toy safety guide for parents, from the shop shelf to the first month.

Where we stand

Peabody is a learning site for children that uses AI to write stories at a child's reading level, so we have a stake in this and you should weigh what we say with that in mind. We think a child should never be in an open conversation with a chatbot, and Peabody has none: no chat with an AI, no toy, no always-on microphone. Our AI policy says what the AI may and may not do, and is AI safe for kids' learning? is the ten-question version for apps. Peabody is free through the end of 2026; read a story at your child's level.

Sources

- U.S. PIRG Education Fund, Trouble in Toyland 2026, 17 November 2026, and PIRG's summary of this year's dangers.
- NBC TODAY, New concerns arise over what AI toys could be teaching kids, Savannah Sellers, 17 November 2026.
- The Register, AI toys are on the naughty list again this year, 17 November 2026.
- Common Sense Media, warns against AI toy companions, January 2026.
- PIRG, AI chatbot toys come with new risks, December 2025; The Register, 13 November 2025; CBS Colorado, 19 November 2025.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/ai-toys-trouble-in-toyland-2026