

Woodworking Tools by Age

What is safe at each stage, from age 2 to 12 and up

Print this and pin it where the tools are. The single most important safety decision is choosing tools that match a child's age and ability.

Age group	Safe tools	What to avoid	Supervision
Toddlers (2-4)	Wooden mallet, golf tees, soft foam or balsa, sanding blocks, glue, large beads	Anything sharp; small parts that can be swallowed	Constant, hand-over-hand
Preschoolers (4-5)	Small real hammer, child-sized screwdriver, sandpaper, hand drill with help	Saws, power tools	Constant, within arm's reach
Elementary (6-11)	Coping saw, hand saw with guidance, hand drill, clamps, brad-point bits	Power tools (except a supervised, guarded drill for older kids)	Direct, same room and watching
Teens (12+)	All hand tools; select power tools with direct supervision	Unsupervised power tool use	Present and attentive

Ages are a starting point, not a rule. Readiness varies. The right moment for any tool is when a child can follow a two-step instruction, keep both hands where you put them, and stop when asked.

A first project that fits

- 2-4: Golf-tee hammering block. Mallet and golf tees pushed into foam or balsa, nothing sharp anywhere near it.
- 4-5: Sanded scrap-wood boat or a wooden name plaque. Sandpaper, glue, paint, and an adult cuts the board.
- 6-11: Birdhouse, toy car or bird feeder. Hammer and nails or a screwdriver, hand drill, sandpaper, wood glue.
- 12+: Toolbox. Hand saw or a supervised power saw, drill/driver, wood glue and clamps.

Six rules that never change

- Goggles on before any tool comes out, for everyone in the work area, every single time.
- An adult is always present. Younger children need one within arm's reach.
- One tool at a time, and put it back in its place before picking up another.
- Tools stay on the table. No walking around with them, no pointing them at anyone.
- Clamp the work, not your hand, so both hands stay clear of the cutting edge.
- Match the tool to the child. Ability, not age alone, decides what they are ready for.