



Choosing Great Toys for Your Child

We want our children to learn through play and we often think of toys as the means for accomplishing this. Before investing money in the purchase of a toy, consider the following questions and ideas.

- Does the toy appeal to the child's stage or level of development? The following list pairs common toys with children's developmental levels at various ages. If your child does not yet show an interest in the toys in his/her chronological age group, drop down an age category or two. Similarly, if your child has a "chronologically-appropriate" toy which s/he is not currently using, put it into the closet and recycle it at a later date when the child has the maturity to find it interesting.
- Is the toy appropriate for the child's current stage of development, not just chronological age?
- For children who have special needs, does the toy fit those special needs and/or aversions? For example, a child who has sensory integration difficulties may find a Jack-in-the-Box too disruptive and upsetting.
- Is the toy fun? If the child does not enjoy a toy it will be useless. Before purchasing a toy, observe what kinds of toys your child is drawn to and purchase a similar toy but at a slightly more challenging level. For example, legos are toys that increase in complexity as the child matures.
- Will the toy contribute to the child's growth and development? The best toys require active, not passive participation and challenge the child's reasoning and motor skills. Limit the purchase of DVD's and video games.
- Does the toy have multiple purposes which require a variety of skills and interests? Some old favorites in this category are blocks, beads, building toys, dolls, toy cars and trucks, crayons, markers and paper.
- Is the toy child-safe? It should have no removable parts which a child can swallow and no rough or sharp edges. The best toys are washable.
- Be a borrower and a lender. Set up a toy swap with a group of friends or a play group. Swap groups of toys with other families at monthly or bi-monthly meetings.
- Toys do not have to be expensive or fancy to be developmentally appropriate and fun. Look at supermarkets, hardware, variety and fabric stores for items that children will enjoy. Gather household objects such as pots and pans, spools of thread, shoelaces or ribbons, plastic containers, wooden spoons and empty boxes.



Toys and Stages of Development

When choosing toys and activities for your child, remember to pick those appropriate to your child's developmental stage. Some items are good for several ages, such as blocks and building materials, books of all kinds, and tricycles/bikes. Children with delayed development may need toys and activities from a younger stage.

Infants birth - 17 months

Toys: rattles, crib toys, mirrors, mobiles, playmats, teething toys, infant swings, squeeze toys, suction toys for high chair and car seats, busy boxes, music.

Skills developed: listening, hand-eye coordination, crawling, balance, standing, independent walking, coordination of the two sides of the body, simple imitation of sounds, social behaviors, beginning language and speech development.

Toddlers 18 months - 3 years

Toys: blocks, shape sorters, ride-on toys, push/pull toys, stacking/nesting toys, balls, board books, sand/water play, play-doh, large beads/pegs, cars/trucks, baby dolls, songs and finger plays.

Skills developed: body awareness, coordination of body movement to rhythms, language and speech development, isolated motion of fingers for grasping and release, hand strength, cognitive concepts like in/out, big/little, same/different, early pretend play.

Preschoolers 4 - 5 years

Toys: simple inset puzzles, lacing beads, tricycles, marble run, books, pretend toys (e.g. cooking/kitchen sets, tea sets and carpenter tools, dress-ups, doll houses), drawing/coloring, simple train sets, toss/catch games.

Skills developed: agility and balance, muscular strength, simple spelling and letter recognition, fine motor coordination, development of dominant hand, independence in personal care activities, pretend play, social and cognitive skills.

Elementary School 6 - 10 years

Toys: legos, bicycles, rollerblades or skates, board games like checkers, beginning sports, cooking activities, dramatic play toys, trains/racing car sets, radio/stereo, CD players.

Skills developed: strength and coordination, social skills, problem-solving skills, copying and writing skills, pretend play, language development.