

Toy Selection Tips

Play is essential for a child's learning. Toys are the tools of play. Toys should be safe, affordable, and developmentally appropriate. Children do not need expensive toys.

Pick toys that...

... the child can do many things with, not just one thing. That way, as your preschooler grows, there will be new challenges with the toy. For example, once a child can easily solve a puzzle, it soon stops being so much fun. In contrast, as your child becomes better at painting, the paints are still appealing, because the child can make better and better paintings with the same materials. The paints adapt to the child's ability level. Other things that can be used at many different skill levels are a ball, clay, or a cardboard box.



... put power and imagination in the child rather than the toy maker. A battery powered robot with flashing lights required a lot of imagination by the toy maker, but a child cannot do many things with it. It will attract your child's immediate attention, but your preschooler will quickly become bored with it. In contrast, imagine all the things a child could do with a stuffed animal, a doll or a push car. These toys are simpler and can

be used in many different ways. They encourage your child's imagination.

... encourage joint activities and cooperation. Children enjoy the most and learn the most in the company of others. Think of materials that prompt playing with others. Classic examples are a ball or Frisbee where it takes two to play.

... prepare your child for the future you expect. You are in the business of preparing your child to live in the future, to be adults 15 to 20 years from now. What kind of world will that be? If you believe men and women of the future will have very different roles in life, then you will direct them to different kinds of toys and activities today. On the other hand, if you think men and women of the future will have similar roles, for example that both men and women will drive trucks and nurture children, then start preparing them today. Encourage both independence and nurturance, in both boys and girls, through play with dolls and toy trucks.

Play with Your Preschooler

Your young child's growth and development can be supported and enhanced through play. Toys bring parents (or caregivers) and children together in play. Toys are not a substitute for loving, unconditional attention

from parents but they can enhance these interactions. When you play with your child, learning is enhanced. A child's self-esteem and level of mastery are also enhanced when adults participate in play. And, playing together is fun!



deemed for "everyone" may contain significant violence. Also, give thought to whether a toy promotes negative racial, ethnic, cultural, or gender stereotypes.

Be Cautious of Toy Product Claims

Some toy advertisements claim their toys help your child become more intelligent. There is no scientific evidence to suggest that any toy is necessary for optimal learning. These advertisements can promote misinformation, inappropriate expectations, and encourage unnecessary spending. Be skeptical of educational or developmental claims made by advertisers, especially product claims of intellectual enhancement.

Consider Safety

Government regulations, improved safety standards for the manufacture and use of toys, and product testing have made most toys safe when used appropriately for recommended ages and stages of development. Just because a product is on the market, though, does not mean it is safe. When thinking about safety, consider the toy as well as how the toy might be used or abused and the amount of supervision or help needed for safe play.

Toys You Select Represent Your Values

Some toys pose emotional or social risks. Graphic depictions of violence presented in an interactive way, such as in some computer or video games, teach children to act violently, according to research studies. Although video games are rated, even those

Who Provides the Creativity to the Toy?

Toys that require the most creativity of children are usually the most plain of materials, such as blocks, paints, or clay. Toys that look the most creative, with bright lights, electric sounds, and moving parts are often the ones that actually require the least creativity by the child. One way to think about this is to ask: *Who provides the creativity to the toy? Is it the child or the toy designer?*

Make a thoughtful selection of toys and remember that a good toy does not have to be trendy or expensive. Find a toy that has:

- Play value—promotes fun, creativity, and enough interest that your child will play with the toy over and over again.
- Has good design—interesting, original, and easy to use.
- Is appropriate to your child—fits your child's age, abilities, and interests.
- Quality—is safe and durable.
- Represents your values—matches with what you think is important.

Sources:

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