



Early Childhood Development Series:

# SELECTING TOYS FOR CHILDREN

PCD-00089

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## Birth to 9 years

Play is a child's work. Toys are the tools of the trade. Appropriate toys need not be costly or complicated to provide many hours of leisure fun and learning.

**How to select toys:** Keep in mind the following important guidelines in selecting toys:

1. Is this toy developmentally appropriate? Toys need to be suitable to a child's age, interests, and abilities.
2. Can this toy be used in many different ways and by different ages of children? If so, the toy may have lasting worth.
3. Will the toy withstand active play of young children? Or, is it a toy that may break after a couple of uses? Saving money to invest in a more durable toy may be worth the trouble.
4. Will this toy stimulate a child's imagination? Often toys that are simple in design allow for many creative useful options.
5. Is this toy safe? Inspect toy packaging for play use and safety messages. Watch for sharp corners and small pieces that could be swallowed.
6. Does this toy permit assembling, disassembling, stacking, or connecting. From these processes, children learn how our world is put together and have opportunities to try their hand at creating.
7. Does the toy encourage cooperative interaction? War toys (play guns, knives, swords) and various play characters (often based on TV cartoons) may inhibit cooperative play. For many children these kinds of toys facilitate inappropriate power struggles and violence, and should be avoided.

### Some appropriate toys for children

From birth to 18 months, children become acquainted with toys. They enjoy rattles, pounding and stacking toys, squeak toys, floating tub toys, picture blocks, strings of big beads, push-pull toys, small take-apart toys, nested boxes or cups, stacking toys and rings, books with rhymes, and musical toys.

From 18 months to 3 years, children enjoy directing, organizing, problem solving, pretending and constructing. A child this age enjoys a tricycle or other ride-on toys, a wagon to get into, sandbox toys, balls, blocks of different sizes and shapes, a wading pool, child size play furniture, simple dress-up clothes, stuffed animals, dolls, simple puzzles, games, take-apart toys with large parts, clay and modeling dough, large crayons, blackboard and chalk, simple musical instruments, finger paints, nonelectric trains and cars, and tea sets.

From 3 to 6 years, children like to create play worlds and modern environments. They enjoy developing movement and communication skills. A child this age particularly enjoys dress-up and pretend. Suitable toys include dolls, store-keeping toys, toy phones, toy clocks, playhouses, housekeeping toys, farm sets, small trucks and cars, small planes and boats, simple construction sets, domestic toys, trains, large tricycles, sleds, wagons, backyard gym sets, record player and records, tape recorder and tapes, paper, story books, paints and brushes, felt markers, sketch pads, blocks and building toys.

From 6 to 9 years, children enjoy learning social strategies, trying out things, and fantasy worlds. They enjoy moving confidently through space and exploring the work worlds. These children particularly enjoy

board games, tabletop sports games, marbles, tops, kites, fashion and career dolls, toy typewriters, racing cars, electric trains, construction sets, science and craft kits, handicrafts, sports and hobbies. They like larger bicycles, ice and roller skates, pogo sticks and scooters. They enjoy books, costumes, doll houses, play villages, miniature people and vehicles, and magic sets.

### Parent involvement – the vital link to engaging play

Parents can **observe** a young child playing to learn more about this unique young person and his special interests. Spending a few minutes each day just watching a young child, teaches adults a lot about children. For example, after making a suggestion for play that arouses a child's response, the parent can sit down and just observe for awhile. The added reward to this special quality time is the message the child absorbs, "my work is important to my family!"

Parents can **talk** with children during play, share ideas and thoughts, develop new ideas, and explore processes and problem solving efforts together. Through these ef-



forts, children develop expanded vocabulary, and understanding of their world. For example, a parent might ask, “I wonder what would happen if...” to lead the child into further exploration of their play.

Parents can **help** children learn **new** ways to play with toys. Through various forms of imaginative play, toys can be used for more than their obvious function. For example, parents can suggest that blocks be used to build a garage – and truck play becomes instantly more complex. They can hold the paper or assist with the tricky puzzle pieces. By playing together, parents and children learn more about the diverse opportunities simple toys provide.

Parents can **enjoy** playing with children, helping them understand appropriate ways to have fun and relax together. From birth onward, children enjoy making eye contact and playing with a parent. Enter the play and play at the child’s level. Take turns making suggestions. Reading a book to a child or singing songs together provide additional treasured memories, new language, new fun, and new ideas.

### **Remember – not all play materials must be purchased**

Some of our best play materials come from the drawers and cupboards in our homes. Children enjoy kitchen equipment – pots and pans, spoons, and measuring cups – that are safe and developmentally appropriate. Discarded special family clothing can create a dress-up box of endearing value to children of many ages. Fancy shoes, brother’s worn out sports jacket, safe jewelry, mom’s old dress, a silky scarf, all contribute to imaginative grown-up play by children of many ages.

Older children enjoy sorting buttons and sewing simple fabric scraps together to create dolls or attractive designs. Children enjoy taking apart old manual typewriters and windup clocks, and planting seeds from fruit. They enjoy cooking, picking berries, and helping in numerous family activities. **Watch** what your child enjoys, make sure the materials are safe and the play is well supervised, and have fun!

### **For further reading**

Dodge, D. T. The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood. Washington D. C.: Teaching Strategies, Inc. 1989.

Fraiberg, S. The Magic Years. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.

Maxim, G. The Sourcebook, Activities for Infants and Young Children. Columbus, Ohio, Merrill, 1990.

Oppenheim, J. Kids and PLAY. Bank Street, 1987.

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