

The Value of Play and Toys of Value

Play is critical to children's healthy development and learning. Play helps children acquire life skills, fulfill social and emotional needs, and build knowledge about the world. The pervasive influence of media (TV, videos, computers) has changed children's play experiences resulting in more children spending less time playing creatively.

Toys influence how we play and can strengthen children's ability to engage in imaginative play, test ideas and solve problems. Many toys available in today's market are highly structured and linked to the media. These toys support imitative, rather than imaginative, play, robbing children of opportunities to be creative and solve problems, important skills for life-long success.

As we approach the gift-giving season, here are a few suggestions to keep in mind when choosing toys. Toys have enhanced play value when they:

- 🎁 Can be used in many ways
- 🎁 Allow children to determine the play
- 🎁 Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development
- 🎁 Are not linked to video games, TV or movies
- 🎁 Can be used with other toys for new and more complex play
- 🎁 Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as children develop new interests and skills
- 🎁 Promote respectful, non-stereotyped, non-violent interactions among children
- 🎁 Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery

Choose toys that promote:

- 🎁 **Dramatic play:** Provides a powerful way of learning new skills and a sense of mastery. Examples: blocks, toy vehicles, dress-up clothes, small animals, dolls, puppets, props to recreate real life, materials for creating small worlds.
- 🎁 **Manipulative play with small play objects.** Develops small muscle control and eye-hand coordination. Teaches about relationships between objects, essential for understanding math and science. Examples: construction sets and toys with interlocking pieces, puzzles, pegboards, miniature models, parquetry blocks.
- 🎁 **Creative arts:** Encourages self-expression and the use of symbols, a vital skill for problem solving and literacy. Examples: paints, different sizes and colors of papers, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, recycled materials, stamps, clay and weaving kits.

- ❏ **Physical play:** Promotes healthy body awareness and coordination, helps let off steam and provides opportunities for social interaction. Examples: wheel toys, balls, bats, jump ropes, pogo sticks, swing sets, climbing structures, tunnels.
- ❏ **Game playing:** Teaches turn taking, strategy, sequencing, rules and cooperation. Examples: board games, card games, jacks.

Avoid toys that:

- ❏ **Lure little girls into focusing on teenage behavior:** These toys create interest in teen appearance & risk-taking behaviors which children imitate but don't understand.
- ❏ **Bring violence into rescue related play:** Since Sep. 11, some toys have exploited children's increased interest in community helpers and focus the play on violence. These toys undermine conflict resolution lessons adults teach.
- ❏ **Link non-nutritious food to play:** Toys that promote junk foods and their logos ensure an early, easy market for unhealthy, brand-named foods. Products like these can contribute to obesity and eating disorders, a growing problem for children.
- ❏ **Separately marked same items to girls and boys:** Promote unnecessary gender divisions. Condition children to choose toys based on stereotyped packaging rather than on the potential play value of the toy.
- ❏ **Use electronics to over stimulate babies:** Young children, especially infants and toddlers, learn best by interacting with people and materials and by seeing how they can directly affect the environment. Often billed as educational, many electronic toys control & limit play & teach babies to expect toys to entertain them.
- ❏ **Equate money and shopping with fulfillment and fun:** Condition young children to believe satisfaction comes from buying and having "things."
- ❏ **Scare children and can make them feel unsafe:** Toys and other products (snack food, clothing, backpacks, underwear, lunchboxes, birthday party items, sneakers, and bikes) linked to violent media rated for older children. Make the world seem like a dangerous place and that you need to fight to feel safe.
- ❏ **Are linked to products rated for older children:** These toys promote children's interest in inappropriate content.



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I.U.S.D. School Readiness Program

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