

Choosing Toys for Toddlers

parents often ask me to recommend specific toys. While this question seems like it should have a straightforward answer, I often find myself reluctant to respond.

From the array of toys available how do you choose the one/s right for your child? How can you tell which are high quality and which will last? Which will engage your child's interest for more than a few days or weeks? Below are some ideas for choosing toys that will grow with your child, offer challenges, and nurture skill development in all domains (including thinking, physical, language and social-emotional skills).

- **Choose toys that can be used in a variety of ways.** Choose toys that are "open-ended" in the sense that your child can play many different games with them. Toys like this spark your child's imagination and help them develop problem-solving and logical thinking skills.

Examples: Blocks, interlocking blocks, nesting blocks or cups, and toys for sand and water play

- **Look for toys that will grow with your child.** We all have had the experience of buying a toy that our child plays with for 2 days and never touches again. You can guard against that by looking for toys that can be fun at different developmental stages.

Examples: Plastic toy animals and action figures, toddler-friendly dollhouses, trains and dump trucks (and other vehicles), stuffed animals, and dolls

- **Select toys that encourage exploration and problem-solving.** Play gives children the chance to practice new skills over and over again. Toys that give kids a chance to figure something out on their own—or with a little coaching—build their logical thinking skills and help them become persistent problem-solvers. They also help children develop spatial relations skills (understanding how things fit together), hand-eye coordination, and fine motor skills (using the small muscles in the hands and fingers).

Examples: Puzzles, shape-sorters, art materials like clay, paint, crayons, or playdough

- **Look for toys that spark your child's imagination.** For younger children their creativity starts to take off around three years and they begin to take on the role of someone else (like a king) and imagine that something (like a block) is actually something else (like a piece of cake). Look for toys that your child can use as he develops and acts out stories. Pretend play builds language and literacy skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to sequence (put events in a logical order).

Examples: Dress-up clothing, blocks, toy food and plastic plates, action figures, stuffed animals and dolls, trains and trucks, toddler-friendly dollhouses, toy tools, and "real-life" accessories such as a wrapping paper tube "fire hose" for your little fire fighter. The all-purpose large cardboard box is always a big hit and is free. (Call an appliance store about picking up one of their refrigerator boxes.) Boxes become houses, pirate ships, barns, tunnels—anything your child's imagination can come up with!

What are the benefits of sounds, lights, and music?

Many, many toys for toddlers are ablaze with buttons, levers, lights, music, etc. Often these toys are marketed as "developmental" because the toy has so many different functions. Unfortunately, this often has the opposite effect for the child. *The more a toy does, the less your child has to do.* If your child can sit and watch the toy "perform," then it is likely more entertaining than educational.

Can toys actually “make my baby smarter,” as the packaging and advertisements often claim?

Proceed with caution. Most products that make these claims have not been proven to increase children’s intelligence. In fact, safe household items (plastic bowls for filling and dumping, pillows for climbing and piling up to make a cave, old clothing for dress-up) are often the best learning tools.

Remember, the more your child has to use their mind and body to problem solve and develop their own ideas, the more they learn.

Buying toys to have at home can become costly. So also consider borrowing from the Echuca Moama Toy library. They offer a wide range of toys that foster the development of the above mentioned skills, as well as providing children with enjoyment and a sense of achievement through play.

<http://www.emtl.com.au/>

Hours: Wednesday 7.30 pm - 8.30 pm & Saturday 10.30 am - 11.30 am

Fees: Family: \$60 per year

Concession: \$45 per year

Limited membership: \$40 per year (4 borrowings per year)