

What Makes a Good Toy?



Stores today are full of toys with “eye appeal” for children and adults. This can make it hard to tell if a toy is worth buying. After all, a child can turn almost anything into a toy! Here are some questions to keep in mind when you make decisions about toys for preschool children.

Is the toy safe?

A toy should be sturdy and suited to the child’s age. Check the package for the toy maker’s age recommendations.

- **Toys with small parts** may be safe for preschoolers, but not for babies or toddlers.
- **Broken toys** with sharp edges should be repaired or thrown out.
- **Toys should be easy to clean and sanitize** to keep germs from spreading.
- **Shooting toys** like BB guns are not safe for children of any age.
- **Toys linked to violent TV shows and movies** can lead some children to imitate aggressive behavior they see in the media.
- **Batteries in toys contain dangerous materials.** Toys that need batteries can be hazardous to your budget, too.

Does the toy engage the child’s imagination and creativity?

- **Children use everyday objects as toys.** They have lots of ideas for how to make them fun! Saucepans and lids, pinecones, pillows, spools, bowls, keys, and empty boxes can easily become part of a child’s play. He can even make his own toys with art materials such as clay, fabric, cardboard, clean plastic bottles, washable paint, markers, and beads.
- **Some toys have a variety of uses.** Building blocks, dolls, animal figures, dress-up props, sand and water toys, toy cars and trucks, and simple construction sets are open-ended toys. They can be used to build models, act out stories, and do experiments.

Does the toy support children’s development?

A good toy can help promote:

- **motor skills:** wooden stringing beads, lacing cards, riding toys, skates, beanbags, balls of all sizes, climbing structures, other sports equipment
- **scientific reasoning and exploration:** magnetic toys, construction sets, toys that work in sand or water, homemade play dough
- **number concepts and problem-solving strategies:** unit blocks, pattern blocks, gear toys, pegboards, puzzles
- **musical awareness:** shakers, sand blocks, tambourines, finger cymbals, bongo drums, and other rhythm instruments
- **preliteracy experiences:** magnetic letters, interactive books, chalkboards, rubber stamps, alphabet blocks
- **socioemotional development:** toy telephones and cash registers, puppets, dollhouses, any toy that encourages children’s “give and take”

For related Web resources, see “What Makes a Good Toy?” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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