



Understanding Children

Toys



Fond memories of childhood usually bring to mind a favorite toy. A cuddly doll, colorful crayons, or a special wagon are all childhood favorites.

Toys bring a great deal of joy to children, but they also can be valuable learning tools. Exploring, pretending, and sharing are just a few of the important skills children develop when they play.

Toys don't have to be expensive. Cardboard boxes in the backyard and measuring cups in the bathtub are favorite standards. But parents who do wish to purchase toys may find it helpful to know what toys to choose and which to avoid for children of different ages.

■ Infants and toddlers

Infants and toddlers learn about the world through their senses. They are interested in the

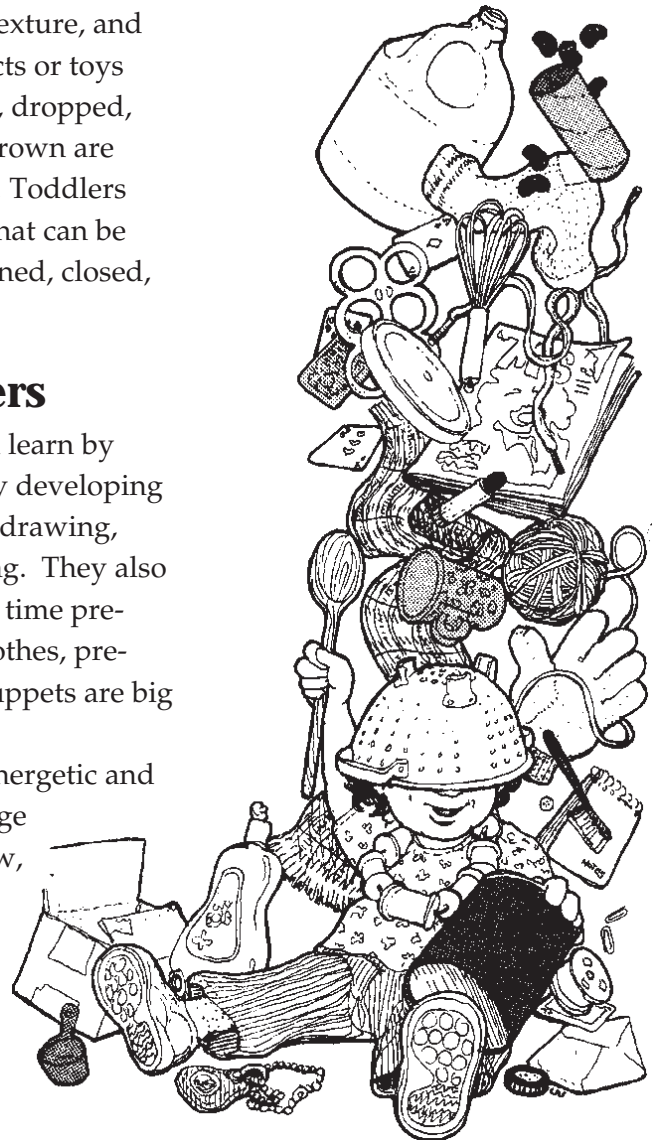
sight, sound, smell, texture, and taste of things. Objects or toys that can be squeezed, dropped, poked, twisted, or thrown are sure to cause delight. Toddlers also enjoy any item that can be stacked, poured, opened, closed, pushed, or pulled.

■ Preschoolers


Preschool children learn by doing. They are busy developing new skills. They like drawing, painting, and building. They also spend a great deal of time pretending. Dress-up clothes, pretend "props," and puppets are big favorites.

Preschoolers are energetic and active. They need large balls to roll and throw, wagons to pull, and tricycles to ride.

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Age	Toys to choose	Toys to avoid	Age	Toys to choose	Toys to avoid
Newborn to 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brightly colored objects • pictures within view but out of reach • mobiles that have objects attached with cords less than 12 inches long • unbreakable toys that rattle or squeak • washable dolls or animals with embroidered eyes • stacking ring cones • tapes or records with gentle music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • toys with parts smaller than 1 ¼ inch (about the size of a half dollar) • toys with sharp edges • toys with detachable small parts • toys with toxic paint • toys with cords more than 12 inches long • stuffed animals with glass or button eyes • balloons 	2 to 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • play dough • large crayons • peg boards with large pieces • low rocking horses • sandbox toys • soft balls of different sizes • cars or wagons to push • simple musical instruments • simple dress-up items like hats, scarves, shoes • sturdy riding toys • books that rhyme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • toys with sharp edges • toys with small removable parts • small objects such as beads, coins, or marbles • electrical toys • lead soldiers • tricycles with seats more than 12 inches high • riding toys
1 to 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • push and pull toys • books with cloth or stiff pasteboard pages • nonglass mirrors • take-apart toys with large pieces • blocks—foam, plastic, or cardboard • nested boxes or cups • musical and chime toys • floating tub toys • pounding and stacking toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small toys that can be swallowed • toys with small removable parts • stuffed animals with glass or button eyes • toys with sharp edges 	3 to 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dolls with simple clothes • balls, any sizes • nonelectrical trucks, trains • building blocks • toy telephone • dress-up clothes • sturdy tea sets • plastic interlocking blocks • blunt scissors • play dough • washable markers, large crayons • sewing cards • simple board games • books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • electrical toys • lead soldiers • flammable costumes • toys with sharp edges or small, removable parts • riding toys used in hilly or inclined driveways

Age	Toys to choose	Toys to avoid	Age	Toys to choose	Toys to avoid
4 to 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building blocks • simple construction sets • modeling clay • nonelectrical trains, battery operated toys • puppets and puppet theater • finger paint • stencils • board and card games • simple musical instruments • small sports equipment • bicycles with 20-inch wheels and training wheels (all should wear bike helmets) • books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • toxic or oil-based paint sets • flammable costumes or ones that can be easily tripped over • kites made of aluminized polyester film (this material conducts electricity) • electrical toys (unless battery operated) • shooting toys and darts with pointed tips • fireworks of any kind • lawn darts 	6 to 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construction sets • sled, roller skates • sewing materials • simple camera • printing and stamp sets • paints, colored pencils • sketch pads • kites • battery powered electrical toys (Underwriters Laboratory approved) • jigsaw puzzles • dominoes • board games • simple tool sets • dolls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kites made of aluminized polyester film (this material conducts electricity) • shooting toys, and toys with loud noises like cap guns • fireworks of any kind • sharp-edged tools • electrical toys run on household current • bikes or skateboards ridden without helmets
	8 to 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hobby materials • arts and crafts materials • musical instruments • sports equipment • camping equipment • construction sets • electric trains • bicycles (26-inch wheels for kids 10 and older) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fireworks of any kind • air rifles, chemistry sets, darts, skateboards, and arrows (unless used with parental supervision) 		

■ School-age Children

School-age children feel more grown-up and love activities that lead to “real products” such as jewelry, “designer” T-shirts, or stamp collections. They also develop a keen interest in sports and enjoy having adult-like physical equipment such as softball gloves, tennis rackets, or skates. They have a better understanding of rules and enjoy playing with others. Board games, cards, or dominoes teach math concepts and problem-solving skills.

Think toy safety

More than 120,000 children are taken to hospital emergency rooms each year for treatment of toy-related injuries. Evaluate toys for your children from the standpoint of safety. The following are some guidelines.



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- Choose toys appropriate to the child’s age. Some toys intended for children more than 3 years old may contain small parts, which could present a choking hazard for infants and toddlers. Toddlers should never play with any object that is smaller than a half dollar.
- Think BIG when selecting toys, especially for children under age three. Big toys without small parts can be enjoyed by youngsters of different ages. Keep toys intended for older children, such as games with small pieces, marbles, or small balls, away from younger children.
- Keep uninflated balloons out of reach for children under age 6, and discard pieces of broken balloons because of the choking hazard.
- Explain and show your child the proper use of safety equipment such as bicycle helmets. Studies show that helmets can reduce severe injuries from a fall.
- Check all toys periodically for breakage and potential hazards. Damaged toys can be dangerous and should be repaired or thrown away immediately.
- Store toys safely. Teach children to put toys away so they are not tripping hazards.

Periodically check toy boxes and shelves for safety.

Visit the following Web sites for more information.

American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www.aap.org/>

Public Interest Research Groups
<http://www.pirg.org/toysafety/>

Toy Manufacturers of America
<http://www.toy-tma.org/consumer/parents/safety/4toysafety.html>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
<http://www.cpsc.gov>

Store toys safely

Toy safety involves choosing the right toy, checking it regularly for damage, and storing it safely. One of the greatest dangers in toy storage is the toy chest with a free-falling lid. Children are injured when the lid falls on their head, neck, or arms. Upright lids in trunks and footlockers pose this kind of hazard.

Open chests or bins, chests with lightweight removable lids, or chests with sliding doors or panels do not present the hazard of a falling lid.

Low, open shelves where toys can be reached easily and put away are a safer alternative and are often preferred by children. Small items such as building blocks or puzzle pieces can be stored in plastic tubs or boxes.

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