

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”

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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