

early years are learning years

Toys: Tools for Learning

Through toys, children learn about their world, themselves, and others. Choosing toys that appeal to your children and foster their learning will help you make their early years count. Toys can teach children to

1. figure out how things work
2. pick up new ideas
3. build muscle control and strength
4. use their imagination
5. solve problems
6. learn to cooperate with others

Remember that good toys are not necessarily expensive, and children do not need very many. The more a child can do with a toy, the more likely it is to be educational. Here are some tips to help you choose toys wisely for your child:

- Hands-on toys build eye-hand coordination, encourage ideas about how things work, and foster cooperation and problem-solving.
- Books and recordings help children appreciate words, literature, and music.
- Art materials foster creativity and build skills that lead to reading, writing, and seeing beauty in life.
- Few toys are as durable as hardwood unit blocks, and they teach children about geometry and gravity, shapes and balance.

Construction items contribute to muscle strength and help children learn about science and number ideas.

Musical instruments and experimental materials such as sand, water, and clay offer children control while appealing to their senses.

Active play equipment builds strong muscles and confidence to meet physical challenges.

Pretend play objects such as dolls, stuffed animals and dramatic figures give children a chance to try new behaviors and use their imaginations.

If your child attends child care or preschool, look at the types of toys available. Is there a variety of safe and interesting toys? For toddlers and young preschoolers, there should be multiple copies of toys—a great way to avoid conflicts.

Get involved in your child's play

Match toys to fit your child's thinking, language, physical skills, feelings, and friendships. Each child grows and develops at a different pace, so watching your child's play and playing together will enable you to choose appropriate toys and worthwhile activities for your child.

Parents who take part in pretend play with their one- to three-year-old children help them to develop more

Good toys are

- appealing and interesting to the child;
- proper for the child's physical capacities;
- appropriate for the child's mental and social development;
- suitable for use in groups of children; and
- well-constructed, durable, and safe for the ages of the children in the group.

varied and complex play patterns. These children, in turn, engage in more pretend play with other children and tend to be more advanced intellectually, better able to understand others' feelings, and considered more socially competent by their teachers.

For a free brochure, "Toys: Tools for Learning," send a SASE to NAEYC, Box #571, 1509 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426.

Additional resources:

- Hirsch, E.S., ed., 1984, *The Block Book*. Washington, DC: NAEYC #132/\$7.
- McCracken, J.B., ed., 1987. "Play is Fundamental." Washington, DC: NAEYC #576. Also available in Spanish: "El Juego is fundamental." NAEYC #566. 50¢ each/100 for \$10.
- Berk, L.E. & Winsler, A., eds. 1995. *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education*. Washington, DC: NAEYC #146/\$8.
- Bronson, M. 1995. *The Right Stuff for Children Birth to 8*. Washington, DC: NAEYC #312/\$8.

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