

## Ages 0 - 2 years: Learning with toys

**Y**es - children learn from toys. And they learn from the boxes and wrapping paper the toys come in, much to the disappointment of the gift giver sometimes! In an age of overwhelming choices and information, how does someone know what to give a child? What will a child find interesting and fun? What will be boring? What is the message you give a child when you chose a certain toy? Play is how children learn and it is important for their development that they have toys that will help them develop interests, and motivate them, encourage understanding of their environment and build information-processing skills.

**Age appropriate:** Toys that encourage exploration and use of imagination are usually appreciated as long as they are age appropriate. A toy for a five year-old may frustrate a three year-old. A toy for a two year-old will be boring for a six year-old. For children under three the Government requires that materials should be unbreakable - able to withstand use and abuse, and no play material should contain small parts or pieces that could become lodged in the throat. For children under eight: toys without electrical heating elements and toys with no sharp points or edges.

**Message:** What is the message you give a child when you choose a toy? A set of blocks allows a child to learn about size, shape, colors, balance, texture, weight, sound and encourages the development of small motor skills, eye-hand coordination, and learning to count and build. A weapon teaches a child to shoot, overpower and kill.

**Infants:** Infants need to see, hear and touch: Unbreakable mirrors securely fastened to a wall or crib; soft dolls with painted features; washable, brightly colored soft animals (no loose parts); simple hand puppets used by an adult. Mobiles hung safely out of reach will help encourage tracking and focusing with their eyes. As babies start grasping they will enjoy rattles, squeeze toys, balls and toys with lots of different textures. Music with gentle rhythms is appropriate. Older infants will enjoy toys that can be pushed, stacked, pinched, squeezed and shaken. They will enjoy soft blocks, pop-up boxes, simple nesting cups, containers to empty and fill, toys that make a sound when shaken and banged. They will enjoy music with repeating rhythms, thymes and songs. Low, soft climbing platforms allow infants safe crawling areas.

**1 - 2 Years:** Pretend play begins between 1 and 2 years of age. In addition to dolls and animals, appropriate simple props include hats, dishes, pans with covers, doll bed, play

phone, cloth bags, child-size tables and chairs. As children near 24 months, they will enjoy play villages, barns, houses, vehicles and other play scenes with people and animals to that can be moved around. Objects should be lightweight and made of washable sturdy plastic or wood. Small motor skills can be encouraged with simple puzzles, stacking toys, activity boxes or puzzles with knobs, dials, large zippers, hooks, simple keys. Sturdy books with simple pictures and rhymes for lap reading and touch-me or tactile books are great.

**2 - 3 Years:** In addition to the objects listed above, older toddlers are ready for more complex toys; fit-in puzzles, large plastic brick blocks, large plastic nuts and bolts, pegboards with large pegs, a variety of people and animal figures to use with blocks, dolls with simple clothes and equipment. They enjoy materials that can be matched, sorted, nested, stacked and put in order. Create your own game by putting an object in a sock or cloth bag and have your child feel it. They need push toys that support pretend play: strollers, lawn mowers, wagons. Large ride-on trucks and a low climbing structure with a slide encourage physical activity. Art supplies for older two's include large crayons, paints, paintbrushes, markers and chalk with a variety of paper. Clay or dough and scissors can be used with close supervision. Sand and water play with containers and simple pretend materials (cars, boats, people, large spoons) are fascinating for this age. There are many CD's and tapes available for this age and supply a simple rhythm instrument - sticks or bells - to use when listening to songs. Books should be sturdy and readily available. Large balls are great for kicking, throwing and catching.

This is only a partial list of items children will enjoy. Don't overwhelm your child with tons of toys! Put some away for a rainy day. A cluttered room will invite chaos. Encourage your child to pick up when they are through; this will make the room inviting and decrease the chance of toys being broken. And no matter how many toys your child may have, they are not a substitute interaction with parents. So play together!

*Information for this article was provided by Early Learning New Hampshire. The organization is committed to ensuring that all New Hampshire children have the opportunity to reach their full potential by expanding access to affordable quality child care and early education, supporting the child care industry; business public-private partnerships; and helping families balance work and family.*

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