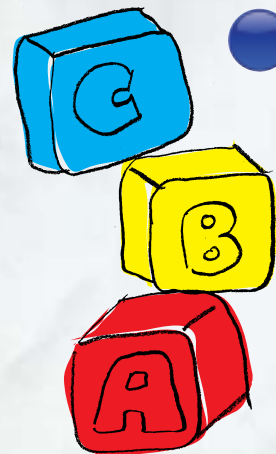


Play is an essential part of growing up. Through play children hasten their own development while they learn about the world around them. This leaflet has been produced by the Australian Toy Association to help you select the best toys for your child. The guidelines in this leaflet are based on extensive research.



The value of play

Why play is important

Play is the way children learn. Children with access to a wide range of well-selected toys are more likely to be challenged and stimulated. Studies find that they reach higher levels of intellectual development, regardless of their sex, race or social class.

Toys that stimulate mental development are appropriate for the child's abilities, responsive to the child's movements, and provide feedback when manipulated. Whether playing alone or with others, quietly or with enthusiasm, play is the way children explore their world and create imaginary ones.

Learning new skills

Even in reaching for a toy your baby develops early hand/eye coordination, strength, balance and agility. Activity centres, block letters, shape sorters and games will help your child learn many new skills. Toys and games that are used with playmates encourage sharing, cooperation and communication. Blocks and models will foster spatial play, whilst jigsaws, dominoes, puzzles and board games are for logical play. Balls and push/pull toys are used in physical play, and verbal play accompanies books and word games. Children use dolls, action figures, costumes and puppets for imaginary play. Research shows that through play children learn how to plan and solve problems. Play encourages them to develop language and communication skills and to use imagination and creativity.

Playful children are happier, better adjusted, more cooperative and more popular with their peers than those who play less. Children play longer when a wide variety of toys is available. It is not necessarily the most expensive toys that provide the greatest stimulation and enjoyment. It is better to have four or five different toys than one very expensive one.

Ages and stages of play

Children differ enormously in their rate of growth and development, so toys should keep pace with children's changing needs and ability levels. As a parent, be sensitive to the interests, abilities and limitations of your children in deciding when they are ready for their first puzzle, book, bike or computer game. Here are some guidelines on the types of toys best suited for different stages of development.



Infants

A baby's first toys are important in teaching about size, shape, colour and texture. In one study, the availability of toys in infancy was strongly related to the child's IQ at the age of three. During the first year, an infant will respond to bright colours and gentle sounds. Musical toys and mobiles are ideal at this age. Babies find it difficult to co-ordinate their hand and eye at first, so they learn about the shape and feel of objects with their mouths. As they gain control over their hand movements, an activity mat is great for exploring textures and shapes.

Toddlers

Half the waking hours of a typical 17-month old are devoted to play, so a variety of toys is essential. They will enjoy toys that move, such as mobiles and rattles. Children begin to enjoy pretend play, so toys that stimulate imagination, such as play sets, toy vehicles, soft toys and puppets, are also popular. Blocks will challenge their imagination and dexterity.

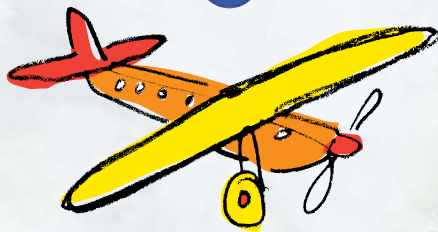
An active toddler will need toys for physical play; toys they can sit on or push and pull. Toys that respond to the child's movements will hold attention, important for reading. Children play for a longer period of time when there is a greater variety of toys available.

3-5 years

Pretend play is the child's way of trying out new skills and growing interests. Puppets are a great way to develop language. As children gain confidence and social skills they enjoy play with other children. Role playing and fantasy games help their social and emotional development. Children like realistic toys that resemble people and everyday objects, such as dolls, action figures, tool sets and household items. They also like construction sets, painting, musical toys and cassette players.

Active play on swings, slides, climbing frames and toy vehicles encourages physical co-ordination and will help them to progress onto tricycles and bicycles. As they develop logic and are able to concentrate longer, they are ready for games with rules like lotto, matching games and dominoes. Memory and imagination can be exercised with electronic toys, board games, and word games.

The value of play



6-10 years

Social skills are learned and practiced in board games, table-top games, and traditional games like marbles. Children experiment with different roles through fashion dolls and action figures. Crafts and costumes stimulate imagination and creativity.

Play pointers

- For play to be of benefit, children should feel secure and comfortable in their surroundings, with supportive adults present and a wide assortment of toys to play with.
- Choose toys that are fun for your child to play with. To be fun they should match the child's maturity and challenge his or her skills. Go for products with lots of features, activities, bright colours, different textures and sounds.
- Children should be encouraged from an early age to get involved in the selection of their toys.
- Play with your child whenever you both feel it is appropriate. However do not force children to play or push them to play games that may be too difficult for them.

Always consider safety when buying for a child. Most of the toys on the Australian market today are carefully made and safe to play with. However it is advisable to follow some simple guidelines to ensure that your child is playing with safe toys.

- Go to a reputable shop. Avoid buying from street traders and markets.
- Beware of secondhand toys - there is no guarantee that they are safe.
- Follow the guidelines given on the toy. A message such as "not suitable for children under 36 months because of small parts" should be taken literally. An age guideline, however, such as "recommended for children aged 3-4" is discretionary and is designed to help you to decide if the toy will be fun for your child.
- Check for sturdy, well-sewn seams and ensure that eyes and noses are fastened tightly.
- Check toys for sharp points and rough edges.

For further information:
ATA, PO Box 74, North Melbourne VIC 3051
Also visit www.austoy.com.au

The ATA acknowledges the work of the National Toy Council (UK) in the development of these materials.

This leaflet is available for download from the Parents Section at www.austoy.com.au

Skills mentioned in this leaflet

PHYSICAL SKILLS

agility
attention span
balance
hand/eye co-ordination
physical co-ordination/dexterity
strength

SOCIAL SKILLS

communication
co-operation
sharing

COGNITIVE SKILLS

creativity
imagination
intelligence
language
logical thinking

maths
memory
planning
problem solving
reading

PERSONAL SKILLS

adjustment
emotional development
happiness
popularity
social development

TOYS MENTIONED IN THIS LEAFLET

action figures
activity centres
activity mat
balls
bicycles
blocks
block letters
board games
books
climbing frames
construction sets
costumes
dolls
dominoes
electronic games
games
jigsaws
marbles

mobiles
models
musical toys
painting, crafts
play sets
puppets
push/pull toys
puzzles
role playing/fantasy games
shape sorters
soft toys
swings, slides
table-top games
tool sets
toy vehicles
tricycles
word games

