

SEVEN TIPS FOR CHOOSING TOYS THAT FOSTER YOUR CHILD'S HEALTHY GROWTH



Did you know there are researchers who study toys? It's true! These experts look at how children learn while they play. Here are a few things they suggest you think about when picking out toys for your baby or young child:

Choose your goal: Think about what you want your child to learn from a toy. If you want to build fine motor skills—like coloring and writing or getting dressed—choose toys with pieces that your child can pick up and move around. If you want your child to learn how things fit together (a skill that helps with early math), try puzzles or shape sorters.

Offer toys for all genders: Buying only “boy” or “girl” toys can mean missing out on both learning and fun. Many kids love dinosaurs, sports, kitchen sets, outdoor play, *and* dress-up. Give them the chance to try it all.

Be a smart shopper: Some toys claim to be “educational” without real proof—like flashcards that say they can teach babies to read. Choose sturdy toys that help your child build skills that match their age.

Choose toys that encourage pretend play: A good rule: the child should do most of the playing, not the toy. Kids often love simple items like boxes or kitchen tools because they can become anything. Using plastic animals to make sounds or footprints in playdough teaches more than turning on and watching a battery-powered toy.

Pick toys that support shared play: Toys should help children have fun, positive play time with others. Even adults talk and connect more with children when using traditional toys instead of electronic ones.

Avoid AI Toys: Toys that use artificial intelligence to talk with children are risky. They have been found to say things that are too mature for children, even with protections in place. Experts worry that AI toys will make it harder for children to understand real-life relationships and follow their own ideas for play.

Include books: Books can also make excellent playthings. Books for very young children are designed to be very durable and interesting. They often have different textures to touch, waterproof pages that can be put into the mouth, bright color contrast to attract attention, and movable parts. There are few toys that are as beneficial as sharing a book and reading to your child. Reading builds emotional connection between parent and child, helps children to understand their own and others' feelings, prepares children to learn to read and to be successful in school.