

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



Did you know there are researchers dedicated to studying toys? It's true; these experts explore how children learn through play. Here are some considerations to keep in mind when buying a new toy for your baby or young child:

**Define your goal:** Determine what you want your child to learn from playing with a toy. If you aim to strengthen their fine motor skills (like picking up small objects, putting on shoes, coloring, getting dressed), consider toys such as a busy board or items with small objects to manipulate. If you want them to grasp how objects fit together (important for math skills), opt for toys they can fit together or build, like puzzles, blocks, or a shape sorter.

**Provide toys for all genders:** Children should explore the world through diverse play. Don't limit choices based on whether they are marketed for boys or girls; you might miss out on great toys and opportunities for your child. Most children enjoy playing with dinosaurs, many children are interested in sports and outdoor activities and lots of children like using kitchen sets or dress up clothes for pretend play.

**Be a savvy shopper:** Be cautious of claims that a toy is educational without evidence, like flashcards that supposedly help infants learn to read. Assess what the toy truly offers and look for items that you and your child can enjoy together or that help them develop age-appropriate skills.

**Look for open-ended toys:** Choose toys that allow flexible play and stimulate imagination. Children often enjoy playing with open-ended items like boxes or kitchen utensils, as they can be many things. Aim for toys that require 90% activity from the child and only 10% input from the toy. For example, plastic animals that can be used to pretend play or to make footprints in playdough are better choices than most battery-operated toys.

**Select toys that enhance shared play:** Whether your child is playing with a parent, caregiver, or other kids, toys should contribute to the relationship, not detract from it. Interestingly, adults tend to communicate more effectively with children when using traditional toys rather than electronic ones. Positive relationships and experiences with caregivers significantly contribute to a child's growth and development.

**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.