

HOW TO PICK A TOY: Checklist for Toy Shopping



Play is an important occupation for children. Through play, children learn about the world and themselves. Toys are the tools of play. The right toy can engage a child’s sense of curiosity, creativity, and imagination. Toys can also be used in play to help children develop physically, mentally, and socially. Occupational therapy practitioners are experts in promoting participation in activity, including play. The following checklist was developed by occupational therapy practitioners to assist you in selecting toys that can help your child learn and develop while having fun.

If you can answer “yes” to many of the questions in this checklist, your toy purchase will likely be a developmentally appropriate toy that is worth the cost.

Questions	Yes	No	Suggestions and Examples
Is the toy safe and age appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Look at the suggested age range. If the age range is too “young” for your child, he or she may get bored quickly. If a toy is too “old,” he or she might get frustrated and give up. Toys that are too “old” could also pose a safety risk due to small parts that can become choking hazards.
Is the toy durable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the toy washable? Will it still work after many months of heavy use? If parts or pieces are lost or broken, how much will it cost to replace them?
Can the toy be played with in more than one way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that offer unlimited possibilities can promote your child’s creativity. Examples: <i>Blocks</i> can be built into towers and walls, knocked down and crashed into, lined up to make trains, traced on paper to make squares, and can even substitute for play food in the kitchen. <i>A sandbox</i> invites children to pour, dig, or build castles.
Does the toy appeal to several senses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Multi-colored toys with sounds, lights, different textures, and parts that move can capture a child’s attention. These toys are usually easy to use, invite children to play in new ways, and encourage them to play longer without becoming frustrated. Example: <i>An activity cube</i> encourages children to play with the bead maze, push buttons, open doors, or put shapes into the shape sorter—without moving to another toy or losing interest.
Can the toy be used in more than one place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that are easy to carry and store make it possible to play anywhere. Examples: <i>Crayons, markers, and write-on boards</i> are great to take on a trip or to a restaurant and help children develop their drawing and writing skills. <i>Sidewalk chalk</i> can also help children develop these skills and can be used at an easel, in the driveway, at the park, or at the babysitter’s house.
Can the toy be used in more than one position?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Can children play with the toy while sitting, standing, or lying on their tummy or side? Example: <i>A baby gym</i> with removable toys can be played with in an almost any position. Plastic rings can be used to move the toys to different heights and areas of the gym that encourage the baby to explore and stretch when reaching for a toy in a variety of positions.

Questions	Yes	No	Suggestions and Examples
Does the toy involve the use of both hands?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that require children to use both hands can help improve coordination. Examples: <i>Construction toys, craft kits, and models.</i>
Does the toy include moving parts, buttons, or gears?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that include ways for children to use their hands and fingers help build the small muscles and coordination needed for writing, computing, drawing, counting coins, and similar tasks. Examples: <i>Lacing cards, LEGOs, and puzzles.</i> Be sure to review these toys for safety: small and removable pieces can present a choking risk.
Does the toy encourage activity and movement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that include ways for children to use their arms and legs help build the large muscles and coordination necessary for catching, throwing, kicking, running, jumping, and climbing. Examples: <i>Balls, toss and catch sets, bicycles and riding toys, and jump ropes.</i>
Does the toy encourage thinking or solving problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that encourage your child to solve problems and complete steps in a certain order also give you the chance to provide feedback. Examples: For babies and toddlers, consider <i>shape sorters, puzzles, and cause-and-effect toys</i> (e.g., <i>Jack in the box</i>). For older children, <i>board games, science kits, and cooking kits</i> may provide an opportunity to work on thinking skills in a fun and exciting way.
Does the toy promote communication and interaction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys that encourage dramatic play and imagination help build social skills and allow children to try out new behaviors. Examples: <i>Toys like dress up clothes or costumes, playhouses, kitchen sets, work benches and tools, and puppets</i> can help your child learn cooperation, negotiation, and asking for help.
Is the toy appealing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider the toy's color, shape, size, and popularity. Will the toy be something your child will want to play with often and over a long period of time? For older children, you may want to choose a toy that is well liked by their friends.
Is the toy worth the cost?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Some of the best "toys" are items you already have at home that don't cost much. Consider whether you can substitute the toy that you are considering buying with something you already have at home. Examples: <i>Colorful plastic cups</i> can be stacked and sorted, and <i>plastic containers and lids</i> can become puzzles. You can play peek-a-boo with a <i>dish towel</i> , turn a <i>coffee can</i> into a shape sorter or a bank, or use <i>chocolate pudding</i> poured over tinfoil in a cookie sheet as finger paint.

The right toy can help to support a child's development and build confidence, all while being fun. Occupational therapy practitioners are skilled at evaluating a child's developmental strengths and needs and selecting toys that provide the "just right" challenge.

Need More Information?

For ideas on how to develop play skills to promote health and well being, check out AOTA's tip sheet, *Building Play Skills for Healthy Children and Families*, available at www.aota.org/playtips, which provides information and ideas on play from early childhood through high school and beyond.

Occupational therapy practitioners help children of all ages and abilities. For more information, go to the Web site of the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

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