



Toys for Fun and Learning



by Lucy Wilson (R.I.P.), Speech and Language Therapist

(Sadly, Lucy died of cancer in 2007, but I know she would wish her sound words of advice would continue to be of help to parents)

Playing is fun and an essential part of development. Through play children learn to expand their thinking processes, interact with others, learn new information and skills, improve their communication skills and, above all, **THEY HAVE FUN!** This should be the key to any toys that you may buy or be given for your child. If the child cannot get enjoyment from a toy he/she will not play with it.

There are several types of play - play with objects and social play, energetic and outdoor play, sand, water, bath-time play, pretend play. While your child is playing he/she is learning and improving their visual attention; listening skills; hand-eye co-ordination; curiosity; visual and auditory memory, concepts of space, time, distance, size, shape; fine and gross motor skills; problem solving; mobility; perception; language skills . . . the list goes on and on. Thus you can see how important it is to choose toys well and wisely for your child - no matter what their abilities are.

PLAY WITH OBJECTS

Not all toys have to be bought in a shop, your home is full of things your child can play with in complete safety and they won't cost you a penny. Look around and see everyday household objects for your child to practice manipulating his/her world. Let them help you around the house, doing your shopping, in the garden. Then when the shopping is put away they can play with the empty boxes, go 'shopping' with the empty bags, stack and sort the tins and fruit and vegetables. Anything you can do, your child can do also. You can also buy them pretend toys to do all these things as they play with teddies, tea-sets, balls, bricks, toy furniture, dolls, etc.

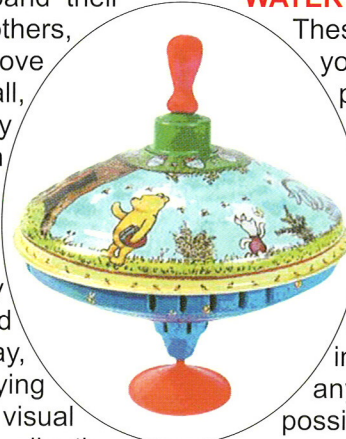
SOCIAL PLAY

This does not need much equipment. All your child has to do is to interact with you or other people. You can play games and sing songs, say nursery rhymes together, play outdoors and indoors, play with one person or several. Buy games such as snakes and ladders and other board or card games and TRY your child with them. You will probably be surprised at how much they do understand and enjoy them. Don't forget you are older and smarter than your child so you can always bend or alter the rules to suit them!

This type of play is also very popular for babies and very young children - lots of rhymes and social interaction and good eye-contact - the only toy baby needs is you!

OUTDOOR PLAY, SAND PLAY, WATER PLAY, BATHTIME PLAY

These are really self explanatory - use anything you have to hand. Balls, bats, bikes, empty plastic bottles and containers, old kitchen spoons and pans, buckets and spades, as well as all the numerous things you can buy for playing in sand, water and baths.



CHOOSING TOYS

Whatever toys you buy think hard about how they can be used, both as the manufacturer intended and also how they could be used in any other ways. Look at the boxes and if possible look at the contents. You do not have to buy expensive toys, children get as much fun from the cheap ones, but do check the safety aspects before you buy.

Experiment with toys and games to find the child's own level. This means ignoring the age levels on the boxes and using your own knowledge of your child's abilities to decide if something is suitable. Choose something that the child is just able to do so that they have something to aim for and something new to learn. Don't put away toys you feel they have 'grown out of'. Children use toys in new and inventive ways all the time and once they are playing with it they are learning something.

For babies and very young children choose things that are full of colour, movement, sound and activity. Things they can watch, listen to, manipulate and concentrate on, are very important for their development, especially if they are not yet mobile in any way. Remember that if your child is in the one place you have to bring the world to them until they can move and find out things for themselves.

Ask yourself if a toy does more than one thing and if it can be used in more than one way. Toys which do something when the child does something first (cause and effect) are great for this. Construction toys, miniatures (e.g. tea-sets, doll's houses), dolls etc., are also good.

Check if the toys are colourful and attractive to children. Also make sure they are fairly sturdy and can put up with lots of use (and abuse). Above all your child must have fun with their toys - no fun means no play and no play means no learning!

(We have repeated this article from a previous issue of the Magazine for the benefit of new parents - it could help you with your Christmas shopping - Editors).



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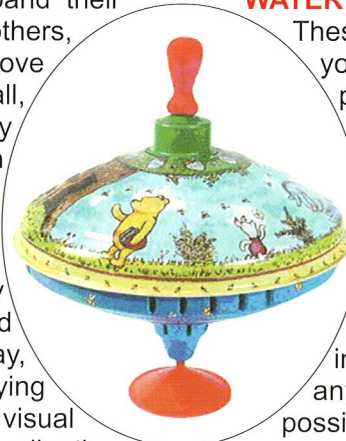
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