



FUN *play*

SAFE *play*

a guide from the
Toy Industry Foundation, Inc.

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Play is universal. Children of every culture engage in play; anthropologists have found evidence of toys dating as far back as there is record of human life. Though play differs from culture to culture, generation to generation, it is clearly an instinctual, essential part of growing up.

While play has existed since ancient times, only recently have we come to appreciate its importance to a child's development. Too often, we dismiss playtime as simply entertainment for our children. Yet, experts consider play to be a child's work. Truly, there is no more constructive pastime for a child. While play is the essential joy of youth, it is also the primary way in which children learn about themselves, others and their world. Through play, children develop the physical, mental, social, emotional and creative skills needed for life.

Given the many benefits of play, parents and caregivers naturally want to make the most of it for their children - to choose appropriate toys, encourage positive play experiences and, above all, ensure safe play. This booklet will help you do that.

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The Importance of Play

Play has an undeniable influence on every aspect of a child's development, laying the foundation for reading, writing, mathematical reasoning and creativity. Through play children develop:

- physical (gross-motor) skills, as a child at play learns to reach, crawl, walk, run, climb, jump, throw, catch and balance
- fine-motor skills (the use of hands and fingers), as he or she handles playthings
- mental skills, through play that encourages problem solving and demonstrates cause and effect
- language skills, which blossom as a child interacts with others and uses words for favorite playthings and activities
- social skills, which are mastered by learning to follow directions, cooperate, take turns, abide by the rules and share
- emotional skills, as children experience pleasure, bond with others, and work through feelings during role-play
- self-esteem, so crucial to one's long-term happiness and success, enhanced when children achieve goals through play
- creativity and imagination; when a child pretends to be a doctor, a teacher, a parent, or a firefighter, he or she learns that life is full of possibilities and opportunities

Perhaps most important of all, play is fun. Years later, when we recall our childhood, it is the happy times spent playing with special people that we remember most fondly.



It has been said that parents are their child's first playmates. Not only do parents have an important role in choosing appropriate toys for their children, but also research shows that children who play regularly with their parents enjoy the greatest developmental benefits. For children fortunate enough to have grandparents and other extended family members who live nearby, playtime with these special adults also can be enriching.

Observe your child, take his or her lead, and offer new ways to play and have fun. Too often, parents think they are too busy to play with their child. Yet, children grow up while we're washing dishes and opening mail. Sometimes life can wait.

Toy Safety Hotline

A cyber-hotline is available with information accessible on a 24/7 basis. This hotline is set up to assist you in keeping your child safe during play, addressing questions about specific toys, offering tips on safe play and suggestions on suitable toys for different age groups. Also available are instructions on ordering free brochures on safe and fun play.

In particular, visitors have access to:

- Contact information for toy manufacturers.
- Toy information by product name.
- Toy information by product category.
- Hot toys for the upcoming season.

As you shop, consider that children of all ages need a well-balanced assortment of toys to contribute to their development and pleasure -- ones for active play, manipulative play, make-believe play and creative play. Study your child, know what his or her interests and abilities are, and read labels to help you make the right selections.

About Labels on Products:

Labels on toy packages take some of the guesswork out of choosing safe, appropriate toys. Child development experts agree that while each child is unique and develops at his or her own pace, there are certain stages that are fairly predictable. For example, children generally sit up unsupported in the middle of the first year and take their first steps in the early half of the second year. These averages help toymakers design and label playthings that will be safe for and appealing to children of a specific age group.

Toys are labeled based on four criteria: the safety aspects of the toy; the physical capabilities of the child (ability to manipulate the toy); the cognitive abilities of the child (understanding how to use the toy); and the child's interests.

The most common safety label warns against choking hazards. Any toy or game manufactured for children ages three to six is required to carry such a warning if the toy contains small parts, small balls, marbles or a balloon. Such toys are not intended for children under three or any child who is still mouthing objects. Other common labels to look for include "flame retardant/flame resistant" on fabric products, "surface or machine washable" on stuffed toys and dolls and "UL Listed" (for Underwriters Laboratories) on electrically operated toys.



Some manufacturers add other safety warnings to the package and/or instructions advising parents that special care should be taken. Toys that would have cautionary labels might include: science toy sets with toxic chemicals, craft kits with sharp or breakable items and crib gyms and mobiles, which should be removed when a baby reaches five months of age or begins to push up on hands and knees.

In our competitive society, it might be tempting to buy a toy for a young child that is intended for an older child. This is not advisable. The age label has been thoughtfully assigned based on many factors including safety. If a child is given a toy that is too advanced, he or she may become frustrated or be exposed to a safety risk.

While labels help consumers narrow down their choices, no package label can tell you exactly which toy is right for your child. Use labels as a guide, but always keep in mind the maturity, skill level and interest of the child when making toy purchases.

Be especially careful when selecting toys for children under three:

- Avoid those with small parts that could be swallowed, aspirated into the child's airway or inserted into the nose or ears
- Check that the eyes and noses of stuffed animals and dolls are securely fastened and that seams are well sewn
- Choose rattles, teething rings and squeeze toys that are too large, even in their most compressed state, to become lodged in a baby's throat.
- Avoid latex balloons, which present a choking and suffocation hazard
- Select unbreakable toys that are lightweight, washable and free of sharp corners, rough edges or strings

An Age by Age Guide to Buying Toys

Based on child development research, the following guide will help in your selection of toys for various age groups. Some playthings are recommended for more than one age category, as children of different ages often enjoy the same toy, each playing with it at his or her own level.

Birth to 6 Months

Abilities and Interests

Experts agree that even babies benefit from toys. Infants use their senses to learn about their world. For the first few months of life, babies are unable to grasp objects with their hands, but enjoy exploring with their ears and eyes. Therefore, toys that make noise or feature high-contrast, black-and-white or brightly colored images are especially appealing to newborns and young infants. Once infants can reach for objects, they enjoy toys that are textured and safe for mouthing. Remember, to avoid dangerous entanglement, toys never should be hung or attached to a crib, playpen, stroller, infant seat or around a child's neck with elastic, string or ribbon.

Toy Suggestions

- Crib gyms*
- Floor gyms
- Activity quilts
- Mobiles*
- Safety mirrors
- Teething toys
- Large, interlocking rings or keys
- Cloth toys
- Soft dolls
- Stuffed animals (with short pile fabric)
- Musical and chime toys
- Rattles

*Remove when baby is five months old or is able to push up on hands and knees.



6 Months to 1 Year

Abilities and Interests

In the second half of the first year, infants master the motor skills that enable them to play with toys in new and exciting ways. When babies can sit up, they enjoy playthings they can manipulate - to bang, drop, stack, put in and take out and open and shut. Once they can crawl, "cruise" (walk while holding onto furniture) and walk, they enjoy things that move along with them. Toys that show cause and effect are also thrilling at this age.

Toy Suggestions

- Balls (1 3/4 inches and larger)
- Push-pull toys
- Busy boxes
- Nesting and stacking toys
- Simple shape sorters
- Pop-up toys
- Soft blocks
- Bath toys
- Teething toys
- Large, interlocking rings or keys
- Soft dolls
- Stuffed animals (with short pile fabric)
- Simple musical instruments
- Rattles
- Squeeze/squeak toys
- Cloth and cardboard picture books

Abilities and Interests

In the second year of life, children are explorers. Fueled by curiosity and wonder, toddlers also possess the physical skills that make it easy for them to play and learn. A busy toddler needs toys for physical play - walking, climbing, pushing and riding - and ones that encourage experimentation and manipulation. At this age, children imitate adults and enjoy props that help them master life skills.

Toy Suggestions

- Balls (1 3/4 inches and larger)
- Push-pull toys
- Ride-on toys (feet-propelled)
- Wagons
- Backyard gym equipment (infant swing, small slide, small climbing apparatus)
- Nesting and stacking toys
- Simple shape sorters
- Pop-up toys
- Puzzles with knobs (whole-object pieces)
- Blocks
- Sandbox/sand toys
- Wading pool/water toys
- Bath toys
- Stuffed animals (with short pile fabric)
- Dolls
- Play vehicles
- Kitchen equipment and gadgets
- Play household items (telephone, lawn mower, workbench, shopping cart)
- Playhouse
- Child-sized table and chairs
- Non-toxic art supplies (large crayons and coloring books, clay, finger-paints)
- Musical instruments
- Cardboard picture books, pop-up books

Abilities and Interests

Older toddlers love testing their physical skills--jumping, climbing, and throwing -- and enjoy toys for active play. This age group also possesses good hand and finger coordination and enjoys putting these skills to work with basic arts and crafts, puppets, blocks and simple puzzles. Imaginative play also begins in the third year.

Toy Suggestions

- Balls (1 3/4 inches and larger)
- Backyard gym equipment (swing, small slide, small climbing apparatus)
- Building blocks and building systems
- Blocks with letters and numbers
- Wading pool/water toys
- Puzzles with knobs (whole-object pieces that fit into simple scenes)
- Dolls that can be bathed, fed and diapered
- Dress-up clothes and accessories
- Hand/finger puppets
- Play household items (telephone, lawn mower, workbench, shopping cart, kitchen equipment and gadgets)
- Non-toxic art supplies (crayons and coloring books, clay, finger-paints, sidewalk chalk)
- Child-sized table and chairs
- Play scenes (e.g., farm, airport) with figures and accessories
- Sandbox/sand toys
- Tricycle and helmet
- Play vehicles
- Wagon
- Shape sorters
- Playhouse
- Storybooks
- Stuffed animals



Abilities and Interests

After the age of three, children begin to play actively with each other. Preschoolers and kindergartners are masters of make-believe. They like to act out grown-up roles and enjoy costumes and props to help them bring their imaginations to life. It is quite common for children this age to develop strong attachments to favorite toys, expressing feelings to a special doll or teddy bear. Materials for arts and crafts are also popular with this age group, which enjoys creating things with their hands.

Toy Suggestions

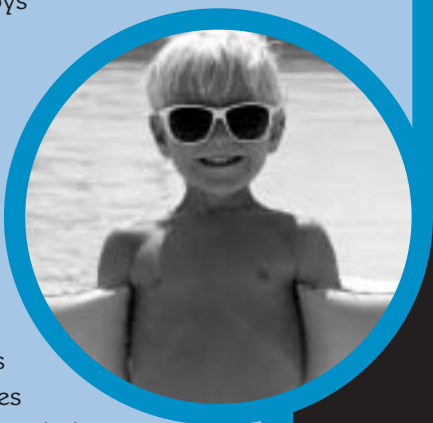
- Tricycle and helmet
- Bicycle and helmet
- Backyard gym equipment
- Construction toys
- Lacing and threading sets
- Puzzles (10-20 pieces)
- Stuffed animals
- Dolls and doll clothes
- Dress-up clothes and accessories
- Props for make-believe play
- Play vehicles
- Hand/finger puppets
- Play scenes with figures and accessories
- Cassette/CD player
- Non-toxic art supplies (safety scissors, construction paper, crayons)
- Simple board games; word and matching games
- Storybooks

Abilities and Interests

School-age children enjoy play that requires strategy and skill. Board games, tabletop sports and classic toys like marbles and kites are favorites. Grade-schoolers also enjoy exploring different kinds of grown-up worlds and like fashion and career dolls and action figures. Children this age seek out new information and experiences through play and enjoy science, craft and magic kits. In addition, this age group possesses the physical skills and coordination to enjoy junior versions of adult sporting equipment.

Toy Suggestions

- Complex gym equipment
- Bicycle and helmet
- Sporting equipment (baseball glove, hockey stick, tennis racket) and protective gear
- Simple swimming equipment
- Stilts
- Ice or roller skates/in-line skates and protective gear
- Construction toys
- Pogo sticks
- Jump ropes
- Action figures
- Paper dolls
- Model kits
- Craft kits
- Magic sets
- Science sets
- Art supplies
- Tabletop sports
- Electronic games
- Jigsaw puzzles, including three-dimensional puzzles
- Fashion/career dolls
- Puppets, marionettes and theaters
- Doll houses and furnishings
- Video games
- Board games
- Cassette/CD player
- Books (children's classics, fairytales)



Abilities and Interests

Preteenagers begin to develop hobbies and life-long interests and enjoy crafts, model kits, magic sets, advanced construction sets, science kits and sophisticated jigsaw puzzles. Active play finds its expression in team sports. Painting, sculpting, ceramics and other art projects continue to be of interest.

Toy Suggestions

- Sports equipment and protective gear
- Bicycle and helmet
- Ice or roller skates/in-line skates and protective gear
- Advanced construction sets
- Jigsaw puzzles, including three-dimensional puzzles
- Puppets, marionettes and theaters
- Remote control vehicles
- Model kits
- Science kits
- Magic sets
- Craft and handiwork kits
- Art supplies
- Playing cards
- Board games
- Chess, checkers, dominoes and other strategy games
- Tabletop sports
- Video games
- Electronic games
- Electric trains
- Musical instruments
- Books (biography, mystery, adventure, science fiction)

Choosing Toys for Children with Disabilities

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photo by Jessica Meharry

While selecting the right toy for any child can be challenging, parents, caregivers and friends sometimes need extra help choosing toys for children with disabilities.

Toy Industry Foundation (TIF – formerly the American Toy Institute) teamed up with the National Lekotek Center - a nationwide non-profit organization - to help make play more accessible for these special children. Lekotek provides the Lekotek Toy Resource Helpline, a toll-free service (1-800-366-PLAY), staffed by play experts who can recommend appropriate toys and activities for children and families.

In addition, TIF offers a number of resources to help children play safely. For more information, please write to:

**Toy Industry Foundation, Inc.
1115 Broadway, Suite 400
New York, NY 10010**

or visit:

www.toy-tia.org.

Adult Supervision is Critical

The toy industry and the Federal government work hard to ensure that toys are among the safest products brought into the home. A toy may go through more than one hundred safety tests to imitate the kind of use and abuse it may get in the hands of a child. In addition, toy labels help parents and caregivers choose the right toys for their children.

Safe manufacturing and careful toy selection, however, are not enough to protect our children. Parents and caregivers should be their own safety experts, ensuring that toys are used, maintained and stored correctly. There is no substitute for adult supervision of play.

Toy-related injuries generally occur when an infant or toddler chokes on a toy intended for an older child, when a child trips over a toy that was not put away after use, or when an unsupervised child hits another with a toy. Most play-related injuries are avoidable.

As Good As New

Toys must also be properly maintained to ensure safe play.

- Check toys regularly for cracks, tears, sharp edges, small parts, loose buttons, dirt, etc.
- Remind children to let you know when toys need repair
- Never allow toys to remain outdoors overnight; rain, snow and dew can cause rust damage
- Discard a toy damaged beyond repair

Toys inspire feelings of ownership in children. This sense of possessiveness presents a perfect opportunity for adults to teach children that care must be given to valued belongings. At an early age, children can be taught to store their toys properly in a place selected by you. This prevents toys from being lost, stolen or damaged. In addition, it may prevent falls and keep younger children away from toys intended for older ones. It is especially important to keep toys off staircases to avoid falls.

If a storage chest is used, be sure it has a removable lid or a spring-loaded support that allows the lid to remain securely open. Also, check for smooth, finished edges, air holes to prevent suffocation and hinge-line clearances to prevent pinched fingers.

Other good options for storing and organizing toys are large, stackable plastic bins, smooth-edged baskets or sturdy, open shelves.



About Toy Industry Foundation, Inc. (TIF)

Toy Industry Foundation is the educational and philanthropic institution of Toy Industry Association, Inc. In addition to educating the public about toys and safe play by distributing materials to institutions, public organizations, parents and caregivers, the Foundation also provides a platform to develop proactive and thoughtful programs and partnerships with organizations that share a commitment to children in need.

About Toy Industry Association, Inc.

Toy Industry Association, Inc. (TIA™), formerly Toy Manufacturers of America, Inc., is the trade group for the North American toy industry. TIA is recognized by the government, trade, media, and consumers as the authoritative voice of the toy industry. The organization, founded in 1916, is based in New York City.

About the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is an independent, Federal regulatory agency that protects the public against unreasonable risks of death and injury associated with consumer products, including toys. To report a hazardous product or product-related injury, contact the CPSC at (800) 638-2772. Hearing- and speech-impaired callers can dial the CPSC teletypewriter at (800) 638-8270. You may also visit the CPSC website at: www.cpsc.gov

To order copies of this booklet:

Please contact us at:

**Toy Industry Foundation, Inc.
1115 Broadway, Suite 400
New York, NY 10010**

For up-to-date information about toys and play, please visit our website at:

www.toy-tia.org

TIF thanks the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, National Lekotek Center and National SAFE KIDS Campaign for their review and support of this publication.

Ten Steps to Fun and Safe Play

1

When shopping for toys, keep in mind the child's age, interests and abilities.

2

Read toy or packaging labels for age ranges and safety warnings.

3

Be especially careful when choosing toys for children under three. Select toys that are free of small pieces (or pieces that separate or can be broken off), are lightweight, have no sharp edges or points and are non-toxic.

4

At home, read instructions for assembly and use. Keep product literature in case of future questions and complete warranty cards.

5

Remove and discard all packaging from a toy before giving it to a baby or small child.

6

Consider the home environment in which a child will play with a toy and younger children who may be there. A toy intended for an older child may be dangerous in the hands of a younger one.

7

Supervise children when they play and set good examples of safe play.

8

Remind caregivers, including grandparents, of play-related safety concerns.

9

Choose a safe storage place for toys.

10

Check toys at least every three months to determine their safety. Make any repairs immediately or throw away damaged toys.

Children are inspired to realize their full potential through play. Thank you for caring enough to help make playtime a safe, rewarding, joyful experience.

Toy Industry Foundation

www.toy-tia.org -- click on "Toy Safety Hotline"

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