

T is for Toys

Choosing Toys That Support Learning and Development

Toys give children opportunities to engage with others, learn about their environment, and build skills. As they grow, young children use toys to enrich their relationships, broaden their imagination, and expand their creativity. In addition to commercially available toys, many common indoor and outdoor materials can be used as toys and there are often opportunities for engaging with them during everyday routines and activities. Research shows offering carefully chosen toys that are appropriate for a child's age, abilities, and interests can help promote their cognitive, communication, physical, and social emotional development.

Tips for Choosing Toys That Support Development and Learning

1. Find toys and materials that are appropriate and interesting.

When choosing toys for a young child, consider their age, ability level and interests. For example, an older toddler who likes to play outside may enjoy using a measuring cup to dig in the sand. Young children may use common materials as toys, such as a preschooler using a blanket as a superhero cape. Some children may need toys that have been adapted to accommodate a motor, visual, or other disability. These questions may help you identify toys that support development and learning:

- Is the toy safe?
- Is the toy available in different settings (i.e., at home and an early care and education program)?
- Does the toy fit with the family's language and cultural preferences?
- Is the toy durable? Is it reasonably priced?



2. Understand which toys can be used to build developmental skills during everyday routines and activities.

Young children learn best when they interact with toys and materials through repetition and routines. Caregivers can observe their child's current skills and help expand them by encouraging the child to engage with toys or materials that support development and learning. For example, during a morning walk, a toddler may use a stick to draw lines in the sand, which helps them develop fine motor skills.

3. Identify how each toy supports the child's development and learning.

Toys and other materials used as toys have specific benefits for each developmental stage. For example, when a preschooler uses a shipping box as a pretend "fort," it supports their social, emotional, cognitive, and language development through role play. Considering and planning for how each toy meets the child's current abilities and needs will provide the child with more enriching experiences with the toy.

• Is the toy safe?

What We are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and its partners are helping families and practitioners identify toys that help to engage children in learning opportunities during everyday routines and activities.