



Toys and Games in the First Three Years

There are now a wide variety of tempting electronic games, gadgets, and gizmos marketed towards even the youngest children. There is no substitution for good old fashioned play to help your children reach their developmental milestones motorically, socially and cognitively. Get down on the floor and really engage with your child during playtime. Read and talk together, sing together too. The only thing to do is to turn off the television, computer; and smart phone and focus on playtime.

There is clear evidence that when you turn off your devices, you and your family talk more and interact more. The more you talk the better your baby's language skills will be.

1 - 3 months:

Babies this age love bright colors, contrasts and shapes. They love mobiles especially things they can grab or swipe. They also love other babies and faces, so an unbreakable mirror in the crib or in the car is perfect for them. You can play with your child by singing softly or shaking a rattle.

4-7 months:

Babies need to practice grasping, manipulating and passing objects hand to hand. Soft round balls or toys that are textured are fun to play with while sitting or propped up, especially if they make noise. Also any toys that are musical or jingle: like bells, maracas and tambourines are engaging and fun. Get down on the floor and play, this will help with motor milestones like rolling, sitting and eventually crawling. This is also a perfect age to begin to read to your baby because at this age babies start to notice the sounds you make and start to babble back to you. Cardboard baby books with lots of colors and pictures are interesting and baby-proof.

8-12 months:

Toys that babies this age can stack or bang together are always fun to play with, the more varied the shapes and colors the better. Bath toys are also fun at this age because your baby can start to sit up in the tub and splash. Large dolls and stuffed toys with no small parts are appropriate. If your baby likes cars and trucks they should be made out of flexible plastic with no sharp edges. As kids develop more mobility, any toys on wheels that they can push or pull are great. Fun games to play include peek-a-boo and hiding any object under a cup or towel because babies this age are just starting to understand that even when they can't see an object it is still there.

12-24 months:

Toddlers are developing more independence and mobility. Therefore outdoor toys like slides, swings and sandboxes, can start to be introduced (with plenty of adult supervision). Kids this age love to imitate you, so props like a toy lawn mower, toy kitchen set, or a dress up trunk are fun additions to the toy box. Dolls, stuffed animals and other props may help augment imaginary play. Also kids this age are starting to learn concepts such as inside, outside and on and under, so get some nesting toys and blocks. Any cause and effect toys are fun, like a busy box or a jack in the box. Simple jigsaw puzzles and shape sorters may also be right up your child's alley.

24-36months:

Children begin to have a vast imagination, and they enjoy playing make-believe with dolls and other toys. At this age children can try creative artwork like drawing, finger paints, and clay. Children really begin to engage with you as you read to them or sing to them and this is a way for you to stimulate your child's language development. Reading together you can point to objects and ask questions, being patient to allow your child to respond. Kids this age are active, they like playing with balls and toys outside, they can start to ride a tricycle and become more mobile.