

TEXAS Parenting News

What makes a toy educational?

When parents buy toys, they sometimes think that it's better to buy those that are "educational." They may look for toys specifically advertised or packaged for their learning value.

Actually, almost anything that a child can learn from safely is educational. This includes many ordinary items around the house like oatmeal boxes and wooden spoons. Educational toys don't have to be expensive, and many are free.

Babies and preschool children learn through their senses—their eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and hands. They need experiences with materials that use all their senses—including ordinary experiences such as grocery shopping and doing laundry.

Simple toys are often more educational than complicated toys because they stimulate imagination and creativity. The more things a child can do with a toy, the more educational a toy is likely to be.

Here are some suggestions, taken from the National Association for the Education of Young Children:



Caution for babies

Use the cardboard tube from a roll of toilet paper or paper towel to judge whether a toy poses a choking hazard. If the toy passes through the tube, it's too small.

- Hands-on toys, like puzzles and toy cars. These materials build eye-hand coordination. They encourage children to think about how things work and how to solve problems.
- Books and recordings. These materials help children learn language. They build knowledge and foster appreciation for literature and music.
- Art materials like crayons, paper, clay, and paint. These materials foster creativity and build skills that lead to reading, writing, and seeing beauty.
- Pretend-play objects such as dolls, puppets, and dress-up clothes. These materials give children a chance to try new behaviors, build social skills, express emotions, and use their imaginations.
- Construction items like blocks. They teach science concepts like gravity and balance and math concepts like geometric shapes and numbers.
- Active play items like balls, wagons, and tricycles. These materials help children build muscles and confidence to meet physical challenges.

Talk to your child's caregiver or teacher. Which materials are your child's favorites? Which materials could help your child develop needed skills?

Talk with your children about the toys they want. Do they want something because "everyone at school has one"? Did they see it advertised on TV?

Remember, children don't need lots of toys. They need materials that are safe and that engage their interest. They need toys that are fun.