

Play and Toy Selection

Play is a natural way for a child to learn. Play allows the opportunities to develop manipulative and motor skills, learn to concentrate and try new ideas, foster curiosity, and exercise initiative and imagination.

- Play helps a child acquire patience, to develop independence and self-confidence.
- A child develops sensory-motor coordination by manipulating objects of various size, weight, shape and texture.
- It is important to choose toys that have high play value and match your child's present stage of development.
- If a toy is challenging it is important to guide your child in its proper use.

Encouraging Play Skills

- Have a sense of humour and have fun yourself.
- When your child initiates play activities, be responsive and play with them.
- Directions can help (i.e., “do more”, “yes, yes”, “I like the way you do this”, “do it another way”, “not bad”, “can you do more?”, “oh look”, etc.).
- Avoid “no’s” whenever possible.
- Provide a “just right” challenge. Not too hard and not too easy.
- Alternate toys regularly. Watch how your child plays to determine the value a toy has for them and when it may be time to get rid of a toy.

Stage #1 → Sensory-Motor

Infant/child's interests are stimulated by the sensory-motor systems, exploring their own body and environment; they use toys to enjoy seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling.

- Children develop the concepts of cause and effect and object permanence in this stage.
- For a child needing extra support, specific positioning and handling may be important in order to facilitate sensory-motor exploration.

- Solitary play or onlooker play is the main method of play children engage in.
- Some sensory-motor toys for this stage include:
 - toys with mirrors, music, lights
 - pop n' spin tops
 - colourful and noisy rattles
 - stacking rings
 - floor gyms



Stage #2 → Manipulative Play

Children enjoy toys that they can push, pull, put in, dump out, squeeze, carry, and pound/hit.

- These toys reinforce perceptual development (i.e., sense of space, size, shape, and force).
- Parallel play ~ child will engage in play along side another child with little sharing.
- Associative play ~ more sharing occurs and the child plays more with others

Some toy suggestions for this stage include:

- playdough
- hammer and ball toy
- pop-up toys
- pop beads
- shapes sorters
- large cars/trucks
- bead mazes

Stage #3 → Constructive Play

Children begin to take the properties of materials into account. They interact with specific material and require differentiation of the various materials.

- Children start to have a mental image of what they are going to construct and proceed accordingly.
- As fine motor and perceptual skills improve, children begin to use sense of shape and size to form concrete objects.
- Children will assemble, arrange, and combine objects to produce a finished product.
- Constructive toy suggestions for this stage include:
 - blocks
 - beads
 - puzzles
 - crayons, paint, markers, etc.
 - easel and chalkboard
 - marble run
 - K'nex, Lego, etc.
 - Magnadoodle



Stage #4 → Imitative Play

Children start to imitate adult routines; copying their actions, both with gestures and verbal expressions.

For example, child pretends to be mother/father and feeds doll bottle; child engages in preparing a play meal; child pretends to drive a car.

Imitative play toy suggestions for this stage include:

- grocery cart
- play kitchen/dishes
- doll house, garage, farm, etc.
- play truck/car
- play baby furniture, etc.

Stage #5 → Imaginative/Pretend Play

Children use pretend play and role playing increasingly and this type of play reflects the beginning of understanding the world.

- First models come from the immediate environment (i.e., family) and later, as a child expands experience and knowledge, assume roles beyond the family circle.
- Moves in collective role-play in which several children participate.
- Full, cooperative play involves taking turns, sharing toys and materials, and friendships with one or a few play companions.

Some examples of imaginative/pretend play toys for this stage include:

- play kitchen/dining room
- doll house
- play workshop
- dress up play/costumes
- play doctor kit, etc.

