

## Toys, Toys, Toys

With the holiday season here, if you have babies and children in your life, you are in the midst of making lists and deciding what gifts to give. If you are buying for young children confusion sets in the moment you enter the toy aisle.

Toys aren't what they used to be. Electronics make even the simple games more elaborate. More toys are available for very young children. In fact, over the past several years, there have been more videos and compact discs available for babies claiming infants will be smarter if they watch or listen to them. I want to caution you on buying into the notion that infants benefit from television, videos or special music.

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "There is no credible scientific data to support the claim that specialized videos or particular music recordings (e.g., 'the Mozart Effect') have a positive, measurable impact on developing brain architecture."

The study from the Center at Harvard concludes that important influences of attention, nurturing and playing with parents or grandparents gives infants as much if not more impact on brain development. Although varied experiences stimulate learning in the preschool years, promotional statements about the superior brain-building impacts of expensive 'educational' toys and videos for infants and toddlers have no scientific support.

So, save your money when thinking about toys for your infant. Invest your time instead and play peek-a-boo, buy books and read, or just interact with the infant. This provides stimulation and learning.

Past the infant stages? Consider the following ideas for toy-giving for your older children:

General recommendations include toys that promote dramatic play and use a child's imagination.

1-2 years

- Blocks with rounded corners
- Push/pull toys
- Books with cloth or stiff pasteboard pages
- Take apart toys with large pieces

2-3 years

- Wooden animals
- Crayons
- Simple musical instruments
- Simple jigsaw puzzles with large pieces
- Toys that aid color, size and shape identification
- Sturdy cars and riding toys/wagon

3-4 years

- Toys for imagination and imitation such as toy telephones
- Tea set
- Dolls
- Construction sets with large pieces
- Blunt scissors/chalk
- Simple card and board games
- Sing-a-long cds

4 to 6 years –

- Building blocks
- Kite
- Paints/paint books
- Stencils, activity books
- More demanding board and card games
- Small sports equipment
- Books
- Finger puppets
- Modeling clay
- 20” bicycle

6 to 8 years –

- Puppets and a puppet theater
- Complicated puzzles
- Well constructed, light-weight tool sets
- Dolls and doll equipment
- Simple science materials (magnets, magnifiers, etc)
- Equipment for playing school, store, bank, gas station
- 24” bicycle

8-12 years –

- Arts and craft supplies
- 26” bicycle
- Skates, skateboard
- Models to put together
- Chemistry and other science kits

Once you have determined what you want to buy, consider if it is safe. Does it have sharp edges? Will it come apart? Are the parts too small and could be swallowed by a small child? Once the toy has passed your safety tests, ask yourself if the toy will encourage your child’s creativity. Will it last for several years? And, above all, does it fit your child’s age, level of development and interest? If so, the toy will be a great fit this season. Happy playing!