

Choosing toys (0-6 years)

What to consider when choosing toys

Toys can be a great way to kickstart your child's play and support her development. But there are so many toys out there that the choice can be difficult. And juggling your child's needs and wants – along with advertising and peer influences – can be tricky.

It might help to know that the best toys for children aren't always the fanciest – they are the ones that stimulate your child's imagination. And your child might not need as many toys as you think.

Toys and your family values

Some families find that particular types of toys do not sit well with their family values – for example, toy weapons and dolls with a very grown-up body shape or clothing style. 'Sexy' dolls can give children, especially girls, the message that the most important thing about them is the way they look.

If you have strong feelings about certain toys, it can be a good idea to talk to your child, especially as she grows older. You could mention your family values. For example, 'Guns can scare and hurt people very much. No-one in our family has a gun'.

It is not always the toy itself that determines the toy's effects on your child's development, but rather the way your child uses it. For example, your child might be using the gun in a make-believe game of cops and robbers. You might think that's fine. But if your child is using the toy weapon aggressively towards other children you might want to guide her towards friendlier ways to play – for example, 'Why don't you and Siti be on the same team and pretend you're both fighting the bad guys?'

It can sometimes be best to adopt a 'watch-and-see' approach to toys like guns and sexy-looking dolls. Wanting to play with these sorts of toys might just be a phase that will pass by itself. But if the way your child plays with a certain toy really worries you, you could suggest your child plays with something else.

Tips for choosing toys for your child

For your **baby**, the best 'toy' is you, a care-giver or other close family member. Your baby will delight in watching your face, listening to your voice and simply being with you. Even play activities like looking at a brightly coloured mobile, listening to a wind-up musical toy and learning to reach for a rattle are more fun when you and your baby do them together.

Toddlers love to play with boxes, and often have more fun with the wrapping paper than the present itself. Other good choices include building blocks and clothing for dress-ups. Toddlers also enjoy simple musical instruments that they can shake and bang – a drum

made from an upside-down pot and a wooden spoon can be just as much fun as a purpose-built toy.

Older children often like to solve problems and use their imagination. Puzzles or games that get your child playing with others are also good choices.

Advertised toys are often designed to promote a particular type of play based on a movie or TV programme. This does not make them bad, but if your child only plays with these toys to copy what happens in the TV shows, rather than using her imagination, they might limit the play options for your child.

The best toys for children are '**open-ended**'. These are the toys that your child can use in lots of different ways. They encourage your child to use her imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills. For example:

- Blocks – one day your child uses them to build a tower, and the next day she might bring a block up to her ear and pretend it's a phone.
- Cardboard boxes – your child can pretend these are shop counters, ovens, cars, boats, doll houses and more.
- Dress-ups – with some hand-me-down clothes and bits of fabric, your child can become anything or anyone she likes.
- Everyday household items like pots and pans, plastic containers, pegs, clothes baskets and blankets – just avoid sharp objects or small objects that could cause your child to choke.



Recommended Reads

- [10 fascinating facts about toys](#)
- [Teddy's favourite toy](#)
- [Baby's Times 24 handmade treasures for baby and mom](#)