

Developmental Toy List to Guide Holiday Shopping

In addition to being safe, good toys for young children need to match their stages of development and emerging abilities. Many play materials don't cost anything. Free items readily found at home--cardboard boxes, plastic bowls, large kitchen utensils, and other "simple treasures"--can be used in more than one way and encourage creative exploration by children of different ages. But when you need some guidance, and family members are asking for ideas to fill your child's toybox at the holidays, choosing high-quality toys is a great opportunity to promote their healthy growth and development!

Toys for Young Infants—Birth through 6 months

Babies love faces and following them with their eyes. Typically, they prefer familiar faces and bright colors. Babies begin to reach and grasp, fascinated with what their hands and feet can do. They lift their heads and begin to roll their bodies towards sounds and sights that interest them. They often explore new experiences by putting objects in their mouths.

- Shatterproof mirrors
- Rattles that are easy to grasp to shake & transfer between their hands
- Large rings that can be held by both hands
- Textured board books
- Ribbon boxes
- Activity mat that encourages tummy time

Toys for Older Infants—7 to 12 months

Look out...baby is on the move! Typically infants go from rolling over and sitting, to scooting, bouncing, crawling, pulling themselves up, and standing. They understand their own names and other common words, can begin to identify basic body parts, find hidden objects, and dump and fill things in and out of containers.

- Bubbles
- Shape sorters
- Bead mazes
- Toys to introduce pretend play—baby dolls, puppets, plastic and wood vehicles with wheels, and water toys for the bathtub
- Toys for "dump and fill"—plastic bowls/cups, nesting toys, balls
- Toys for early building play—large soft blocks and wooden cubes
- Toys for large muscles—large balls, push and pull toys, and low, soft things to crawl over
- Toys for music/sound exploration—small maracas or bongo drums



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Toys for 1 year-olds

One-year-olds are on the go! They are beginning to walk and climb. They enjoy stories, say their first words, and can play alongside other children (but not yet with!). They like to explore, but need adults to keep them safe.

- Board books with simple illustrations or photographs of real objects
- Toys for music/sound exploration—cymbals, tambourines, recordings of songs & rhymes
- Toys to introduce creative play—chalk, aqua doodle sets
- Different soft textured balls for rolling and soft catch/throw play
- Toys for pretend play—dolls and doll bed, baby strollers, toy phone, stuffed animals, simple dress-up accessories (hat, purses), puppets, plastic and wood “realistic” vehicles
- Toys for building play—cardboard and wood blocks (can be smaller than those used by infants—2 to 4 inches)
- Toys for large and small muscles—puzzles with knobs, large pegboards, toys with parts that do things (dials, switches, knobs, lids), push toys (shopping cart, bubble mower), cloth tunnel

Toys for 2 year-olds

Toddlers are rapidly learning language and have some sense of danger. Nevertheless, they do a lot of physical “testing”: jumping from heights, climbing, hanging by their arms, rolling, and rough-and-tumble play. They have good control of their hands and fingers and like to do things with small objects.

- Toys for creative play—wide non-toxic, washable crayons, dot markers, large paintbrushes and fingerpaint, large paper for drawing and painting, colored construction paper, easel chalkboard and chalk
- Thick, puffy stickers and paper
- Toys for solving problems—wood puzzles (4 to 12 pieces), blocks that snap together (duplo), objects to sort (by size, shape, color)
- Toys for pretend and building play—blocks, smaller (and sturdy) transportation toys, construction sets, child-sized furniture (kitchen sets, chairs, play food), dress-up clothes, puppets, and sand and water play toys
- Picture books with more details than books for younger children
- Toys for large and small muscles—large and small balls for throwing and kicking, ride-on push toy (not powered), small play tent/fort w/ tunnel, low climbers with soft material underneath, and pounding and hammering toys



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Toys for 3-4 year olds

Preschoolers are beginning to have longer attention spans than toddlers. They are becoming more verbally expressive during their play and daily routines. They like to experiment with things and with their emerging physical skills. They like to play with others, but need adults to help model sharing and turn-taking.

- Toys for solving problems—floor puzzles (12 to 24 pieces), blocks that snap together, collections and other smaller objects to sort by size shape, color, smell, quantity, and other features-counting bears, etc.
- Toys for pretending and building play—large blocks, blankets and “fort” building sets, transportation toys, construction sets, play food/cash register, play workbench with tools, dress-up clothes, dolls with accessories, puppets and simple puppet theaters, sand/water toys
- Toys for creative play—large and small crayons and markers, large and small paintbrushes and fingerpaint, thick paper for drawing and painting, colored construction paper, preschooler-sized scissors, easel/chalkboard and large and small chalk, playdough, models tools (rollers, plastic scissors, small shaped cutters), glue stick,
- Picture books with words and more detailed pictures and stories
- Toys for musical exploration—keyboards, xylophones, harmonicas
- Things for using their large and small muscles—large and small balls for kicking and throwing/catching, ride-on toys including tricycles and strider/balance bikes (bicycle helmet), taller climbers with soft material underneath, wagons and wheelbarrows, plastic bats and balls

Toys for 5- 6 year-olds

Early elementary-aged children are becoming more proficient with play that requires use of the smaller muscles in their hands. They like to play with friends. They can take turns, sharing one toy with two or more children with positive encouragement from adults.

- Toys for solving problems—puzzles (24+ pieces), simple lego kits
- Toys to creative expression—crayons and markers, paintbrushes and washable paints/watercolors, large and small paper for drawing and painting, colored construction paper, child safety scissors (blunt tip), wipe-off board and markers, sticker books, modeling clay and playdough, modeling tools, slime kits
- Books with sight words and engaging illustration
- Toys for large and small muscles—large and small balls for kicking and throwing/catching, small safety cones to create goals/targets, bicycle (with training wheels) and scooters (bicycle helmet), balance boards/rocks for obstacle courses

