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Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education

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## Choosing Good Toys

The toy-buying season seems to be in full swing. It's an exciting time, but families can feel overwhelmed when trying to stretch their dollars and at the same time make their children's dreams come true. If you haven't already done so, take a few minutes to put together a guide to good toys and distribute it to your families.

What is a toy? Toys are tools or props that children use for play. Many safe household items make excellent toys and don't require parents to spend a penny: plastic bowls and cups, dress-up clothes, empty boxes of different sizes, paper sacks.

What makes a good toy? The best toy can be played with in many ways-it doesn't do just one or two things. A good toy is well-made and attractive, it matches the child's age and interests, and it stimulates development of the child's physical, cognitive, social, and/or emotional skills.

What are some good toys?

- For infants: rattles, busy boxes, stacking toys, shape sorters, soft baby dolls, board books
- For toddlers: balls, push and pull toys, stuffed animals, crayons, play dough, simple puzzles
- For preschoolers: dolls, rubber or plastic animals, vehicles, blocks, art materials, balls
- For school-agers: board games, construction sets, doll house, roller skates, puppets, art materials

Find out more

[Good Times With Toys](#) (National Network for Child Care)

[The Undiscovered Obvious](#) (Parents' Choice Foundation)

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## GOOD TIMES WITH TOYS

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### WHAT ARE TOYS?

Playing is important to children. It is the way they practice growing up. Toys are the tools children use in play. Toys can be purchased, or they may be as simple as kitchen pan lids or paper sack puppets. Anything children can play with safely can be a toy. In fact, you may have watched infants open presents and noticed that they spent more time playing with the ribbon and wrapping than with the toy inside.

Try to remember two or three of your favorite toys. Were they ones you created yourself or ones someone made for you?

Toys can be divided into several groups, depending on the part of the child it helps to develop.

- Toys for physical or muscle development such as wagons, bikes, boxes, puzzles, blocks, brooms, and shovels.
- Toys for sensory (touch, sight, sound, taste, smell) development such as water toys, musical instruments, bubbles, play dough, and sand toys.
- Toys for make-believe and social development such as dolls, dress-up clothes, cars, trucks, games, and books.
- Toys for creative and intellectual development such as clay, crayons, paints, books, paper, and scissors.

Sometimes toys fit into more than one category. A wagon can help develop children's muscles and also be used as the "ambulance" in a hospital game. Children need a balance of toys from each of these groups to ensure their whole development.

### WHY ARE TOYS IMPORTANT?

Children need to have direct experience with the world in order to make sense of and learn about it. Have you ever thought about all the things children learn after they are born? They learn how to talk, sit up, walk, and run. They learn what things are and how they work. They learn about people and the world. They learn all of these things by playing with toys.

For example, babies are not born knowing about gravity. They do not know that anything dropped will fall to the floor. They learn this, by playing with toys. Infants may accidentally let