



Teachers Resisting Unhealthy
Children's Entertainment

INFANT & TODDLER PLAY AND TOY GUIDE

This guide explains why quality play is vital for the growth and development of infants and toddlers and how to support it.

INSIDE:

- ♦ **WHY IS QUALITY PLAY SO IMPORTANT?**
- ♦ **WHAT ARE THE BEST KINDS OF PLAY AND TOYS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?**
- ♦ **WHAT TOYS SHOULD BE AVOIDED?**

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT PLAY TODAY?

In the 21st century, quality play is being undermined because:

- Infants and toddlers are spending many hours in front of screens.
- The increase in electronic toys, games, DVDs, and interactive devices can turn infants and toddlers into button pushers and screen swipers. This is NOT play.
- Many infant-toddler toys are marketed as educational without any evidence to prove this claim.
- Many toys are linked to popular media programs and characters. This encourages very young children to want toys tied to a favorite character, despite the poor quality of the toy or play that results.



WHY IS QUALITY PLAY SO IMPORTANT?

Teachers, doctors, and researchers all agree that—right from the start—children learn best through play. Young children need to be actively involved in their play for it to promote optimal learning and development. But, in today's world, this kind of play is being threatened.

QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Safe and trusting relationships with parents and caregivers in the lives of infants and toddlers are vital for healthy development. By interacting with children through positive, supportive play experiences, adults help them build the foundation they need for loving and healthy relationships throughout life.



QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES LANGUAGE

One of the greatest achievements in the first three years of life is the development of language. You can promote it by using simple words to describe what your infant or toddler is doing when engaged in play. Respond to your young child's sounds, words, and gestures throughout the day. These interactions lay the foundation for language *and* brain development.



QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES CREATIVITY

Creative play experiences grow from your child's interests and abilities. What children do (*the process*) is much more important than anything they make (*the product*). Current brain research shows that young children learn best when they explore, experiment, and discover for themselves rather than being shown what to do by adults.



QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES THINKING SKILLS

The play described in this guide gives infants and toddlers opportunities to learn age-appropriate concepts and problem-solving strategies that enhance their play experience and are critical for future academic learning.

QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provide time for *active* play in safe, open spaces, both indoors and outside, while offering materials that encourage infants and toddlers to move their bodies. Limit the time spent in car seats, swings, and other places that restrict their movement.

QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES SOCIAL SKILLS

While playing with others, infants and toddlers gradually learn about the effects of their behavior. Although very young children may not be developmentally ready to "play" cooperatively, interacting with others lays the foundation for future friendships.



CREATE THE SCENE FOR PLAY

- Provide a safe and open play space where children can move around freely.
- Provide a few high-quality toys at a time and rotate them to keep children interested. Too many toys make it hard for infants and toddlers to focus.
- Provide opportunities for same- and mixed-age play. Babies and toddlers learn by watching other children play.
- Provide inexpensive household objects to encourage hours of creative play.

Try:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| ◇ Small pots and pans | ◇ Measuring spoons |
| ◇ Wooden spoons | ◇ Plastic tubs with lids (yogurt and/or margarine containers) |
| ◇ Cardboard boxes | |
| ◇ Cups | |
| ◇ Paper towel rolls | |



QUALITY INFANT AND TODDLER TOYS...

CAN BE USED IN MANY WAYS

Quality toys can be used in more than one way and grow with the child. For example, a young toddler can use a set of nesting blocks for filling, dumping, and stacking. Later on, these same nesting blocks can be used for sorting and as imaginative props such as car garages or towers or homes for animals!



ENGAGE THE SENSES

Babies learn by using all of their senses. They become engaged in play with materials that have a variety of textures. They respond to lots of physical contact, singing, and dancing with loving adults. For older toddlers, playing with sand, finger paint, shaving cream, and natural materials found outdoors provides opportunities for learning using touch, smell, sight, and sound.

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ALLOW CHILDREN TO USE THEIR IMAGINATION

Playing with stuffed animals or dolls that are not tied to a TV show or other media allows young children to develop their own play ideas, recreating simple scenes from their own experiences. Through this kind of imaginative play, children develop creativity and problem-solving skills.



LET CHILDREN MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR PLAY

A quality toy does not “do” something for the child at the push of a button. For example, a battery-operated doll that repeats the same phrases over and over limits what your child might pretend. A soft and simple doll does whatever the child decides.

TOY & PLAY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INFANTS (0-12 MONTHS)



ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG BABIES, A PARENT OR CAREGIVER, IS OFTEN THEIR BEST TOY! Make facial expressions, sing, dance, bounce, and gently move their body parts to rhythm. These rich interactions help infants develop relationships and learn about the world around them.

SIMPLE TOYS ARE PERFECT. Babies love shaking toys that make noise. Provide toys to hang overhead for grasping, noise-making toys for kicking, teething, and toys with a variety of textures such as soft balls and “baby paper.”



PEEK-A-BOO TOYS AND MIRRORS help your infant experience concepts such as cause and effect and understand object permanence (that an object continues to exist when it moves out of baby’s sight).

STACKING CUPS & BLOCKS. Build a tower for your older baby to knock over. Bang cups and blocks together to make noise.

BIG HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS LIKE LAUNDRY BASKETS OR LARGE BOXES provide quick homemade fun for a baby to explore, climb into, push, and pull.

TALK WITH YOUR BABY ABOUT WHAT YOU HEAR, SEE AND SMELL as you walk around your home or your neighborhood. This enriches your child's experiences and vocabulary, too.



TOY & PLAY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TODDLERS (12-36 MONTHS)



BLOCK PLAY helps children learn to solve problems and to plan. Offer simple props such as animals, vehicles, and fabric to stimulate creativity and imagination.

SAND AND WATER PLAY provides opportunities to develop early concepts about quantity such as full, empty, a lot, a little. Add small toys such as vehicles, animals, plastic containers, bowls, and spoons to encourage imaginative play, small motor development, and eye-hand coordination.

POTS, PANS, UTENSILS, BROOMS and other safe household objects give toddlers opportunities to pretend as they imitate the familiar actions of adults.

DRESS-UP CLOTHES, FOOD, AND KITCHEN TOYS inspire toddlers' imagination. Baby dolls can be favorite toys for both boys and girls.

PUZZLES promote problem-solving, flexible thinking, and learning about parts and whole. As toddlers grow, add puzzles with interlocking pieces to the simpler puzzles they enjoyed as babies

PUSH AND PULL TOYS such as small wagons and toy strollers develop large motor skills. Older toddlers can learn to ride tricycles.

BALLS help toddlers learn to kick and throw. Rolling a ball back and forth supports the development of cooperation.



ART encourages self-expression, creativity, and understanding of cause and effect. Provide varied materials such as large pieces of chalk or crayons, finger paint, glue and collage materials. Remember—the process is more important than the product!

READING BOOKS nurtures social, emotional, and language skills. Choose books with detailed pictures and stories. Read books with repetitive words, rhyming, and on topics of interest to your child. Talk about books together. Point to objects and pictures that go with the words as you read.

Adaptable, open-ended materials allow babies, toddlers, and children of different ages and stages to play together. If possible, have enough for all the players, as children this age are not ready to share.

INFANT & TODDLER TOYS TO AVOID

Some toys are very seductive for children and parents. But, don't be fooled! Toy companies make you think that you need special toys to help your child learn and they label many toys as "educational," even though there is no proof that they promote quality play or learning.

HIGH TECH AND INTERACTIVE DEVICES

Toy and technology companies say that watching videos like Baby Einstein and playing with interactive touch screen apps help babies get smarter sooner. In fact, these "toys" can interfere with a young child's developing brain, as they encourage lack of involvement with real people and objects in the real world. Researchers found that infants who watched screens learned fewer new words than babies who never watched screens and spent more time interacting with parents and caregivers or engaging in creative play. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says that most of the so-called "educational" apps target rote academic skills, do not result in developmental gains, and are not based on input from educators or developmental specialists. The AAP recommends avoiding digital media use in children younger than 18 to 24 months (except for video chatting with family members).



FLASHY TOYS WITH LIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Generally, the simpler the toy is, the better it is for your child's developing mind. Flashy toys are appealing and may temporarily entertain, but they limit creativity and discovery which are important building blocks of development and learning.

TOYS AND OTHER ITEMS BASED ON TV SHOWS

Even though children want toys that are based on characters from TV shows or movies, such toys limit imagination as children often just try to imitate what they have seen instead of creating their own play. Experts also warn that such toys can encourage consumerism and unhealthy food choices.





WARNING: Baby DVDs Can Delay Development!

The Campaign for Commercial-free Childhood (CCFC) filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission

(FTC) saying there is little research to support manufacturers' claims that these toys boost development. In fact, some research finds these items can delay development. In 2008, the FTC agreed with CCFC and told companies to change their false advertising. Disney agreed to refund consumers for a limited time. For details, go to:

www.commercialfreechildhood.org.

Beware of BRANDING!

Marketers for toys, clothing, and foods often use a TV character, like



from Disney or Sesame Street, to capture young children's attention. Why is this a problem? When kids see a product with a character they know, they want it because it's familiar. Licensing agreements, which promote branding efforts, can lead to nagging and unwise buying choices. If the character is promoting junk food, it can also lead to unhealthy eating habits.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFO AND RESOURCES ABOUT INFANT & TODDLER PLAY AND TOYS, VISIT

WWW.TRUCETEACHERS.ORG



TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment) is a national group of educators deeply concerned about how today's children's entertainment and toys are affecting the play, learning, and behavior of the children in our classrooms.

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For more information and to find other TRUCE publications, including our "Seasonal Family Play Plans," "TRUCE Guide for Using Children's Books to Promote Play," and "TRUCE Play Boxes," visit www.truceteachers.org, find us on Facebook at TRUCE Teachers, or contact us at truce@truceteachers.org.