



Teachers Resisting Unhealthy  
Children's Entertainment

# TRUCE 2015-16 ANNUAL TOY SELECTION GUIDE

## TOYS OF VALUE & TOYS TO AVOID

*This annual review helps parents choose toys that promote healthy play and avoid toys that undermine it. In this age of technology, media, and marketing directly to children, it is especially important to make informed toy choices.*



## CONSIDER BEFORE YOU SHOP...

- **Be thoughtful.**

Read our media and play guides at [www.TruceTeachers.org](http://www.TruceTeachers.org) to become better informed.

- **Search out classic toys at yard or garage sales.** With just a little clean-up, the toy may be as good as new.

- **Beware of toy shopping with your children.** Understand the enormous impact of marketing to children today. Children may beg for the latest, heavily marketed toys that they spot at the store, but often those are the very toys that should be avoided.

## CHOOSING TOYS OF VALUE

Toys have high play value when they...

- Can be used in many ways.
- Allow children to be in charge of the play.
- Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development.
- Are not linked to video games, computers, TV, or movies.
- Can be used with other toys for new and more complex play.
- Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as children develop new interests and skills.
- Promote respectful, non-stereotyped, non-violent interactions among children.

- Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery.
- Can be used by children to play alone, as well as with others.
- Can be enjoyed by all children, regardless of gender.



# TOYS OF VALUE

The toys listed in each category below are examples of toys that support healthy play. These are intended to be used as guidelines for making your purchasing decisions, not as product endorsements.

## LET'S BUILD!

### TOYS FOR CONSTRUCTING



- **60-Piece Unit Block Set.** Melissa & Doug. 3 & up. \$54. Classic building toy encourages children to create their own structures in hundreds of different ways.
- **Build Abouts Modular Fort Kit.** Mindware. 4 & up. \$49. Cardboard panels slide together to allow children to construct their own forts, clubhouses, and other structures.
- **Magnatiles.** 3 & up. \$51 for 32-piece set. Colorful, translucent magnetic shapes fit together for hours of creative construction.
- **Lincoln Logs.** Hasbro. 3 & up. \$21. This classic toy includes log-shaped, wooden pieces that fit together to construct log cabins and other structures.
- **Grid Blocks.** Care Play. 18 mos-5 years. \$75 for 16 piece set. Durable, colorful blocks fit together to create buildings, tunnels, and other large structures.



- **Lauri Locktagons.** Patch Products. 3 & up. \$30. Flat plastic shapes with slots that lock together to build 3-D structures.

## LET'S DRAW!

### TOYS THAT INSPIRE CREATIVE ARTS



- **Toulouse Laptrec. B Toys.** 18 mos. & up. \$40. Magnetic drawing board that can be used over and over. Ideal for travel.
- **Kinetic Sand, Sandbox, and Molds.** 3 & up. \$18. Squeezable, moldable sand that sticks to itself, is easily cleaned up, and stimulates children's creativity.
- **3-in-1 Magnetic Artist Easel.** Cra-Z-Art. 3 & up. \$40. Double-sided easel has dry erase board, chalkboard, and place to clip a piece of paper for drawing or painting.

## LET'S MOVE!

### TOYS THAT PROMOTE ACTIVE PLAY

- **Phlat Ball.** Goliath. 5 & up. \$10-\$15. Throw like a frisbee or transform into a ball for dozens of games, indoors or out.
- **GlowWubble.** 6 & up. \$13. When fully inflated, this ball is 3 feet wide, glows in the dark, floats like a bubble, and can be kicked, thrown, or sat on. For indoors or out.
- **Crazy Legs.** Endless Games. 3-6 years. \$16. Players move their pawn around the board. Landing on a space, they must do a yoga pose, exercise, or dance. On some spaces, everyone moves.



# TOYS OF VALUE continued

## LET'S PRETEND!

### TOYS THAT PROMOTE DRAMATIC PLAY

- **Round the Town Rug.** Melissa & Doug. 3 & up. \$26. Children drive four wooden cars (included) or their own vehicles on the roads around town, making up their own stories.
- **Royal Capes.** Magic Cabin. Ages 3-10. \$34. Soft, hooded capes in blue, pink, or red encourages children to make up their own stories about kings and queens, superheroes, magicians, or whatever they can think of.



- **Play Silks.** All ages. Seven silks from Magic Cabin, \$69. Nylon scarves from DreamSpun Kids; six for \$29. Encourages children's pretend play. Can be used as blankets, capes, parts of forts, costumes, flags, and much more, limited only by the child's imagination.
- **Dr. Doctor Kit.** B. Toys. 18 mos.- 5. \$23. Children can pretend to be a doctor or nurse with this medical kit, which includes nine doctor tools, such as a working stethoscope, blood pressure cuff, and thermometer. All the tools fit inside the carrying case.

## LET'S WORK TOGETHER!

### TOYS THAT FOSTER TEAMWORK

- **Engineering Ants Board Game.** Peaceable Kingdom. 5 & up. \$20. Board game requires children to work together to free the ants and overcome obstacles (anteater, sticky mud, etc.) along the way.
- **Feed the Woozle Board Game.** Peaceable Kingdom. Ages 3-6. \$20. Players work together to feed the Woozle



## BEWARE OF THE SCREEN TRAP!

Screens are everywhere and kids love them, but they can lure children away from play. Some apps and games say they are educational, but they often can trick children into following preprogrammed scripts, instead of creating their own play adventures. TRUCE hopes this Guide will help support healthy, active play for your children for the 2015 holidays and beyond!



# SELECT TOYS THAT PROMOTE...

**MEANINGFUL LEARNING THROUGH PLAY.** Toys of value enhance children's natural ability to engage in imaginative, meaningful play that allows them to try out new ideas, solve their own problems, and find their own solutions. When children play this way, they are developing a solid foundation for success in school.

## **POSITIVE SOCIAL PLAY.**

Toys like balls, blocks, and dress up clothes encourage children to cooperate and create positive play with other children. Competitive play teaches children that playmates are opponents and winning is the primary goal. When we support cooperation, children learn to respect each other's ideas, find solutions to challenges, and work toward a common goal.

## **RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.**

- **REDUCE:** Involve children in sorting through the toys they have outgrown. Donate or hold a toy swap.
- **REUSE:** Put away toys when children lose interest, and reintroduce them at a later date.
- **RECYCLE:** Transform everyday items into instruments, art materials, and toys.



# AVOID TOYS THAT...

- **CAN ONLY BE USED IN ONE WAY,** encouraging all children to play the same way.
- **LOOK EXCITING BUT QUICKLY BECOME BORING** because they only require children to push a button and watch what happens.
- **DO THE PLAYING "FOR" CHILDREN,** instead of encouraging exploration and mastery.
- **LEAD CHILDREN TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH TV OR OTHER MEDIA,** letting the screen take control of their play.
- **LURE CHILDREN INTO WATCHING THE TV PROGRAM OR OTHER MEDIA** which is linked to the toy.
- **PROMOTE VIOLENCE AND SEXUALIZED BEHAVIOR,** which can lead to aggressive and disrespectful play.
- **SEPARATE GIRLS AND BOYS** with highly gender-divided toys.
- **INTRODUCE ACADEMIC CONCEPTS AT TOO EARLY AN AGE,** leaving less time for creative play that best prepares children for academic learning.



# TOYS & TRENDS TO AVOID

The toys listed in each category below are dramatic examples that illustrate harmful toy trends. When you shop for toys this year, make sure to ask yourself if the toy fits into one of these categories. If it does, then consider another choice, using our recommended *Toys of Value* list.

## BUY, BUY, BUY!

### TOYS THAT PROMOTE CONSUMERISM

- **Shopkins.** Moose Toys. 5 & up. \$13. Small, plastic “collectibles” with a shopping theme (market, clothing store, shoe store, etc.). The Shopkins line is made up of different collections that encourage children to want every set. Shopkins’ motto: “Once you shop, you can’t stop!”
- **Play Money Set.** Melissa & Doug. 3 & up. \$20. Cash drawer stocked with U.S. currency. For many children, this could mean a focus on shop, shop, shop.



## BANG...YOU'RE DEAD!

### TOYS THAT PROMOTE VIOLENCE

- **Zombie Strike Dominator Blaster.** Hasbro. 8 & up. \$40. Four flipping drums hold six darts a piece, so children can fire up to 24 darts without reloading. Looks like an assault weapon.
- **WWE Super Strikers Six-Inch Action Figures.** Mattel. 6 & up. \$13 for each figure; \$15 for the arena “playset.” Children manipulate action figures to fight each other. Recommended for ages 6 and up, but based on a PG13 show.



## SO SEXY, SO SOON

### TOYS THAT MAKE SEXINESS AND APPEARANCE THE FOCUS OF PLAY

- **Barbie Rainbow Hair Doll.** Mattel. 5-10. \$18. Change the color of Barbie’s hair to “match” her outfit. Highly sexualized dolls.
- **Monster High Freak Do Chic Toralei Doll (and other Monster High products).** 6 & up. \$20. “To-die-for pink boots and furrific accessories complete the killer look.”
- **Disney Princess Glam Styling Hair Tote.** 3 & up. \$15. Pink sequined hair accessory tote bag with hair dryer, curling iron, etc. “Hair care has never been this much fun.”
- **Pretty in Pink Put and Take Purse.** Bright Starts. 6 mos. & up. \$12. Pink and purple plastic purse contains replicas of money, keys, mirror, cell phone.



## TOYS THAT “SOLD OUT”

### TRADITIONAL TOYS THAT NO LONGER PROMOTE CREATIVE PLAY

- **Duplo and Lego Sets Linked to Media and Gender-Divided.** 18 mos. And up. Prices vary. Girls’ sets are pink and/or purple with themes like Disney princesses, pony farm, and shopping mall. Boys’ sets linked to such violent media as Star Wars, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Minecraft, and superheroes.
- **Playdough Sets Linked to Media and Gender-Divided.** Disney/Fisher-Price. 3 & up. Linked to Star Wars, Disney princesses, and Hulk. Children try to recreate the movie or show, but not their own stories or creations.
- **Note that traditional toy sets from these toy lines still exist.**



# TOYS & TRENDS TO AVOID continued

## SWIPE, TAP, & STARE!

### WHEN TECHNOLOGY REPLACES PLAY

- **Kidizoom Smart Watch DX.** Vtech. 4-9. \$54. Has every feature that imitates adult watches, from camera to calculator to several games. With these watches, kids can wear their screens on their wrists and never be away from them!



- **Baby Beat-Bo.** Fisher-Price. Ages 9 mos-3. \$33. Push the button and watch the toy do the playing.
- **Hello Barbie.** Mattel. Ages 6 & up. \$75. Barbie records and sends a child's private conversations via Wi-Fi to cloud servers where they are listened to by live people. The doll then responds, based on the child's family, likes, and dislikes. This stifles play and creativity. There are concerns about privacy and marketing, too. For more info, visit [www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org).
- **Smart Toy Bear.** Fisher-Price. Ages 2-5. \$90. Computer disguised as a teddy bear. Parents provide info about the child—name, age, favorite color, etc. They can download



"how their child is progressing." The bear "plays games" with the child—designed and programmed by adults, removing any creativity from the child to make up his/her own games.

## MEDIA MANIA!

### TOYS INFLUENCING KIDS TO IMITATE BUT NOT CREATE THEIR OWN STORIES

- **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Sewer Lair Playset.** 4 & up. \$119. Pieces allow children to recreate scenes from the movie.

- **Sing-Along Elsa Doll.** Frozen. 3-5. \$30. Elsa sings "Let It Go" from the movie. The child chimes in on the mike (included). But that's the only song (and not the best song for girls to learn). Enough to drive parents crazy!



- **Minions Sing and Dance.** Despicable Me. 4 & up. \$28. One more toy that does the playing. Turn it on and it sings and dances, while the child watches.
- **Paw Patrol Riders Pup Pad.** 1-5. \$15. Based on the TV show. Push the buttons and the characters say phrases from the show. Boring!



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

This Guide was prepared by the Steering Committee of TRUCE. Special thanks to the students in Professor Bartolini's "Issues in Early Care and Education" class at Wheaton (MA) College for their invaluable contributions to this Guide.

For more information or to find other TRUCE publications, including our Seasonal Family Play Plans, visit [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org) or write 160 Lake View Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.