

6 Tips for Selecting Toys to Jumpstart Your Toddler's Language, Cognition, & Play

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1. Select open-ended toys that do more than one thing

- An open-ended toy is one that can be played with in many ways and does not have a definitive end point. A perfect example – blocks. The child can dump them in and out of containers, stack 'em, knock 'em down, then eventually build and create masterpieces. Refrain from purchasing too many single function toys – ones that only do one thing. For instance, a toy that only lights up when you turn it on. Children tend to quickly get bored of such toys.

2. Require manipulation by the player to produce a change

- These toys have a cause and effect aspect (e.g. a Jack in the Box or a toy that has a key to unlock a door) or multiple parts (e.g. Mr. Potato Head or shape sorter). Such toys increase problem solving and thinking skills.

3. Build confidence yet still challenge so they can ask for help.

- Striking this right balance can be a little tricky. You want your toddler to enjoy and delight in the play but also learn new skills. When deciding on a toy, ask yourself: "How much support will my child need to understand and play with this toy? If he needs some help that is fine. Gently, encourage your toddler to use an appropriate word like "help" or "open" when your assistance is needed rather than quickly accepting a grunt or handing you the toy to fix or start. The book, *My Toddler's First Words* can guide you in developing first words to drive your toddler's early language skills.

4. Promote independence

- While playing with your child makes your heart sing, there are times you need to get things done. So, select a few toys they can play with by themselves. Puzzles, doodle pads, reusable non-toxic sticker pads, window clings are good choices because they are safe and not too messy. Finger paints may be fun but if you can't closely supervise your toddler, you may be washing paint off the walls.

5. Increase pretend play and socialization

- Around 24 months old, the alluring world of make-believe begins. As mentioned in the book, *My Toddler Talks*, toddlers typically start to participate in pretend play routines. These early play routines usually represent daily activities. Thus, a kitchen set, play house, or a toy vacuum are great choices.

6. Get them moving and grooving!

- Hide the iPad and disconnect the television – active play burns energy, strengthens muscles, coordinates movements, fires neurons in brains, and improves attention, memory, and thinking skills. Throwing, rolling, and catching soft balls, bouncing and volleying balloons, gliding around on ride-on toys and scooters, and playing modified games with toddler sized sets of tee-ball and basketball promote active play. Be sure to choose some toys that will entice your toddler to hop off the couch and skip around outside or prance up and down your hallways!

Safety If your child is still putting everything in his mouth, avoid toys with small parts, read the label and find out where the toys are manufactured. Stay away from toys that contain magnets and are brightly colored as they may contain lead paint. Check out the Consumer Product Safety Commission for the latest recalls.



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