



## News Articles, AAP Clinical Report

### Best toys for children's development? Hint: They are not electronic or costly

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Parents are overwhelmed with messaging and claims about how the latest "educational" toy or app is going to make their child smarter or more prepared for school. At the same time, accelerating scientific advances have demonstrated the critical importance of early brain and child development across the lifespan.

The new AAP clinical report *Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children in the Digital Era* supports pediatricians as they counsel parents, focusing on what we know about toys and dispelling pervasive misinformation. The report complements recent reports from the Academy related to play, media, school readiness, toxic stress, literacy promotion, injury prevention, toxicology and poverty.

The report from the Council on Early Childhood is available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2018/11/29/peds.2018-3348> and will be published in the January issue of *Pediatrics*.

#### What we know about toys

A toy's most important attribute is its capacity to bring the parent or caregiver and the child together in playful interactions that are warm and full of rich language, supporting the parent-child relationship and the child's social-emotional and cognitive-language development. This is the "power of play" recently highlighted by the AAP (<http://bit.ly/2RiSzmV>).

High-quality toys can be helpful "props" for promoting playful interactions by providing a shared focus for the parent and child that is developmentally aligned and engaging. Toys that promote pretending together (e.g., dolls, characters and animals) can facilitate use of words and narratives to describe feelings and emotions. Imaginative play with such toys also can support language development, self-regulation and social-emotional development.

Playing with toys such as blocks and puzzles can support fine motor skills, cognitive and language development, and early spatial skills and math. Use of toys such as balls in physical activity can support gross motor development, self-regulation and peer interaction because of negotiations around rules that typically take place.

#### Dispelling myths

Many claims advertised for toys and apps are not based on scientific evidence. Furthermore, concerns about potential harm are emerging as the line has blurred between toys and apps. For example, electronic and digital add-ons increasingly found even in physical toys may actually hinder caregiver-child interactions. The harmful effects of screen time also are an important consideration, especially for young children.

Although it has been suggested that interactive media may promote learning, there is no evidence to show that possible benefits match those of active, creative, hands-on and pretend play by parent and child with traditional toys.

#### Advice for parents

- A good toy does not have to be trendy or expensive. The best toys are those that support warm, verbally rich interactions and quality time for the parent or caregiver and the child.



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- Choose toys that will grow with the child, encourage exploration and problem-solving, and spark the child's imagination, such as puppets and blocks.
- Reading aloud and play go hand-in-hand in supporting social-emotional, cognitive, language and early literacy development. Use children's books to develop ideas for pretending together while playing with toys. Learn about programs available at the local library.
- Limit screen time based on AAP recommendations. For children younger than 18 months, avoid use of screen media. For children 18 to 24 months, choose high-quality programming. For children older than 2 years, limit media to one hour or less per day of high-quality programming.

*Drs. Mendelsohn and Healey are lead authors of the clinical report. Dr. Mendelsohn is a member of the AAP Council on Early Childhood Executive Committee.*

### Resource

- [The clinical report includes resources on selecting toys and encouraging healthy development, including Zero to Three: Tips for Choosing Toys for Toddlers.](#)
- [AAP News Parent Plus column "Toy-buying tips for children with special needs"](#)