

Educational Toys

Most parents try to give their children the best start in life they can. They feed them carrots and apples for snacks, keep track of their school performance, and also try to buy educational toys. That is wonderful!



So what IS an Educational Toy?

- ❖ Is it one that seems kind of boring but could teach them some facts?
- ❖ Is it one that is labeled "educational" or "early learning" on a website or in a store?
- ❖ Is it one that requires interaction with an adult before a lesson can be learned?
- ❖ Is it some toy that is labeled with "teaches cause and effect" or "sequencing skills" or "fine motor skill practice" or maybe even "teaches spatial orientation concepts"?

Those sound really good and official! Isn't it always better to buy toys that teach?

In truth, though, ALL toys are educational. Every toy teaches the child something. Check out the following list of "toys" and the things they can teach:

Cheap plastic toy- really inexpensive toys can break quickly
Cup in the bathtub- how to pour, pouring slowly means dribbles down the cup, water surface stays flat
Squeezy toy- practice in fine motor skills, sense of relaxation
Wrestling figure- how to hurt people, it is fun to hurt people
Paper and crayons- spatial relations, color names, fine motor skills
Puzzles- concentration, spatial relations, fine motor skills, cats lay on them and chew them
Spinning light toy- cause and effect, fine motor skills, if you throw it down it will break, battery toys last longer if they go off automatically
Dirt- it smells good, it tastes bad, it turns to squishy mud if you add water, it can grow plants
Big new educational toy- you can sit on it, it won't work if you lose this piece, pushing three buttons at once makes a sound that is really annoying to mom, cause and effect...

Anyway, you get the idea. Babies and children absorb information all the time. (Sometimes the lessons they learn are not always the ones we want them to learn!) So don't be too quick to think that a toy has to be labeled educational for it to be of value.

Get a variety of toys to see what they like or have talents for. Make sure they have access to crayons, paper, puzzles, books, balls, musical toys, and some free time to experiment. Sit down with them once in a while and enjoy playing with them. Inspire them by showing them new ways to use the toys and then let them use their imagination. Encourage them with impromptu art shows, parades, and by taking pictures of their results.



My favorite Christmas present as a child was just a box full of colored paper, glitter, glue, sequins, stickers, etc. My daughter's favorite was a pretty box full of squares of silky or lacey fabrics, cheap plastic bead necklaces, and garage sale hats, for dress-up. My son's favorite was a farting toy. Boys.

One more thing-if a toy is to be used, it must be fun. We have probably all bought a wonderful educational toy that never got used more than once. Too many educational toys just don't have enough of the fun factor. (However, the toy may still be appropriate for a classroom where anything that isn't a worksheet is welcomed by the students!) So be careful and make sure that the toy is appealing and fun. A toy on a shelf isn't teaching a child much of anything.



And yes, sometimes we can buy a toy just because it looks like fun.

By Dee Carrick, Owner of OZMO - The fun store for Autism
www.ozmofun.com Where of course, all the fun is educational!

