Toy Buying Guide

What to look for when buying toys:

1. No batteries
2. Follow your child’s interest
3. Toys that have multiple uses
4. Active toys
5. High quality, durable
6. Toys that spark creativity and imagination

When your child is actively engaged in playing (not watching TV or pressing buttons on a battery operated toy), he or she is developing cognitive, speech, and language skills!!

Speech Therapist's Top Toddler Picks

1. Nesting Cups
   - **Nesting Cups:** This is one of my FAVORITE toys. I use this almost daily during speech therapy with toddlers.
   - **WHY?** Stacking cups are incredibly versatile and attractive to toddlers. Kids always gravitate towards them and these simple cups manage to keep their attention for a long time.
   - **HOW?** Stack them up and make towers. Put objects inside each cup as you say a word. Hide objects underneath the cups and have fun finding them. Talk about colors. Count them. Talk about sizes. Fill with dirt and sand and dump out. The list is endless.

2. Blocks
   - **Blocks:** Blocks are a classic toy that come in all shapes and sizes. If you are handy, you can even make your own.
   - **Why?** Blocks spark creativity and imagination. Children create whatever they want to! I can tie in almost any speech or language goal while playing blocks.
   - **How?** Practice following directions by telling your child what and where to put blocks. Work on concepts "more," "tall," "high," "up," fall," "on," "over." Work on speech sounds by having your child say a word before getting a block. Build creations and talk about them (i.e., build a castle and talk about who or what goes inside.) Again, the list is endless!

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3. Houses/Farms/Barns
- **Houses, Farm, or Barns:** These structures are great "containers" where imagination can grow! You can even make your own out of empty boxes.
- **WHY?** I love using houses or barns in speech therapy for toddlers. They are inherently a relevant, meaningful "category" for learning vocabulary. Also, teaching basic story grammar is easy!
- **HOW?** Find people and/or animals to go in your structure (categories). Find "real" and "silly" ones. Introduce the idea of setting (place), characters (people), and plot as you create imaginative stories.

4. Active Toys
- **Active Toys:** These are toys that get our children up and moving.
- **WHY?** We learn best when we pair motor skills with language learning. Also, active children love to play so mixing language with activity creates a wonderful, meaningful language learning opportunity.
- **HOW?** Talk about what you are doing as you are doing it. For example, as you bounce on a ball, say "bounce." Add descriptive language such as high" or "fast."

5. Sand Toys
- **Sand Toys:** These are buckets and toys to dig and build in the sand, dirt, water, or even cooked spaghetti! These simple toys are one of the best kids toys out there.
- **WHY?** Playing in the sand or dirt or wherever is a great sensory activity for motor and language development. Kids LOVE it too. Your toddler will be busy for hours!
- **HOW?** The motor aspect of these activities are obvious. Speech and language wise- you can hide objects in the sand and find it. You can work on the verbs "pour," "dig," and "find."

6. Vehicles
- **Vehicles:** Vehicles include cars, trucks, buses, trains or planes.
- **WHY?** Almost all children love cars and trucks. Not just boys! They are an active game and I can weave almost any speech or language goal into car play.
- **HOW?** There are SOOO many things to do with cars. I will just give a few examples of areas you can work on: following directions, colors, counting, /g/ and /k/ sounds (go car), descriptive vocabulary.

7. Stickers
- **Stickers:** This can include small stickers, wall decals, or these REALLY cool box stickers below.

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Speech Therapy Talk

- **WHY?** I use stickers ALL THE TIME for almost any age. They are great motivators and very versatile.
- **HOW?** In therapy, I put stickers on objects as we name things. This works on vocabulary and speech goals. You can also use the box stickers to make your own toys or use the wall decals to create wonderful stories that introduce basic narrative structure.

8. **Play Food**
   - **Play Food:** This includes all plastic and wooden food.
   - **WHY?** Through experience during language therapy, I noted that ALL children love playing with food. That is why it makes the best kids toys list. It is relevant and familiar to them. It is great for learning categories, verbs, and vocabulary.
   - **HOW?** Group food into different categories (breakfast, lunch, vegetables, sweets). Pretend to make food while practicing sequencing. Work on the verbs "cook," "eat," and "give." This list is also endless! We have a theme developing here, ha!

9. **Bubbles**
   - **Bubbles:** These explain themselves. Really....who doesn't still believe bubbles are pretty cool.
   - **WHY?** Bubbles are next to magic for kids. They are one of the best kids toys and the cheapest! They grab and keep children’s attention! They are a great motivator as well.
   - **HOW?** Practice turn-taking. Practice 2 word phrases, i.e. "pop bubbles." Great activity to work on /p/ and /b/ sounds. Describe bubbles...shape, color, size. Again, this list is endless!

10. **Magazine!**
    - **National Geographic Kids:** I don't recommend any magazine but National Geographic Kids and Little Kids does a great job with its educational content and pictures.
    - **WHY?** Your child will be excited to get his or her new magazine each month. It encourages reading and learning about nature, science, and a variety of vocabulary words. Also, it is a special parent-child activity to look forward to each month.
    - **HOW?** The magazine that you choose will depend entirely on the age and attention of your child as well as how to you use it. For some, you can actually read the stories using our shared reading techniques. For some, you can describe pictures, talk about animals, colors, and introduce lots of new vocabulary words!

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