

# early years are learning years

## Tips for holiday toy-choosing

When we think of gifts for children during the holiday season, we often think of toys. Toys may be at the top of children's wish lists—and at this time of year, there are plenty to choose from. But the selection can be overwhelming for both children and adults.

When making your selection, bear in mind what you know about toys that are safe, educational and appropriate for children. Take this opportunity to share information with those who may give your child gifts. Show them how to choose toys that are tools for children's learning.

Here are some holiday toy-choosing tips:

- Remember good toys do not have to be expensive, and children do not need very many of them. We've all seen children become fascinated with the box in which a toy arrived! Knowing this, consider the educational value before buying expensive toys—will the toys appeal to children for many years? In general, the more things a child can do with a toy, the more likely he is to remain interested.
- Just because a child asks for a specific toy doesn't mean it will necessarily make the best gift

for her. Children may have strong immediate reactions to what they see or hear. But a toy that looks good in another child's hands or in a commercial may not remain meaningful or interesting to your child.

- Don't hesitate to put a gift toy away for a later time. If a child is bombarded with new playthings, feel free to put some gifts aside and let her focus on one at a time. You may even want to reserve a few toys for bad-weather or sick days later on in the year.
- Some people may not immediately recognize the characteristics of appropriate children's toys. Share information about how to choose gifts that can enrich your child's play and learning. Matching toys to fit the language, skills, and feelings of individual children will help their early years be learning years.
- Art materials may not last forever, but they foster creativity and help children develop skills that lead to reading, writing, and seeing beauty in life. Fingerpaints, watercolor markers, and large sheets of paper make great gifts. Just don't forget to dress children in washable clothing!

Toys can teach children to use their imaginations, solve problems, build muscles, and figure out how things work—not to mention how to cooperate. Good toys are

- appealing and interesting to the child;
- proper for the child's physical capacities;
- appropriate for the child's mental and social development;
- suitable for individual play or to encourage learning to play with others; and
- well-constructed, durable, and safe for the age of the child.

Despite the festivities, parents and teachers frequently identify this season as stressful for children. Taking a little time to read a story or play a favorite game or puzzle can be remarkably calming for children and adults alike.

