

## Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment

# Infant & Toddler Play, Toys & Media ACTION GUIDE

First Edition

*You want to provide your little one with experiences that will enhance healthy play and development. This guide will help you understand why quality play is vital for your child's growth and what you can do to support it.*

## What is different about play today?

### *Creative play is being challenged because:*

Infants and toddlers are spending many hours in front of a screen.

Many toys are marketed as educational when in fact there is no evidence to prove it.

The increasing number of electronic toys, games and DVDs often turns our infants and toddlers into passive players whose main activity becomes pushing a button.

Toys are often linked to popular media characters. Branding toys for the very young means that when they are older they often want an item simply because it is linked to a familiar character, not because of the quality of the toy.

## Why is quality play so important?

*Play is essential to early learning; children need to be actively involved in their play in order to develop basic learning skills. Doctors and teachers say it's how your young child learns about herself and her world.*

### **QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

The most important part of your child's healthy development is safe, trusting relationships with you and the other caregivers in her life. Interacting with your child through positive, supportive play experiences will help her gain the confidence she needs to build loving and healthy relationships.

### **QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES LANGUAGE**

One of the greatest achievements in the first three years of life is the development of language. Talking with your baby and toddler about what is happening around him while playing and responding to his sounds, words, and gestures lays the foundation for healthy brain development, as well as future success learning how to read and write at school.

### **QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES CREATIVITY**

Creative play experiences come from your child's interests and abilities. It's the process that's important in creative play – what they do, not the product they make in the end. Current brain research shows that children learn best when they experiment and discover for themselves rather than being shown by adults.



### **QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

It's important that you provide time for active play in a safe, open space with materials that allow children to move their bodies and use their senses. Limit time spent in car seats, swings, and other restricted spaces.

### **QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES THINKING SKILLS**

The kind of play described in this guide, gives your child the opportunity to learn concepts and problem solving strategies which are critical for future academic learning in science, math and literacy.

### **QUALITY PLAY PROMOTES SOCIAL SKILLS**

Through play, your child will learn how to get along with others. Although your young child may not be developmentally ready to "play" with other children, interactive experiences will help set the foundation for future friendships.

# WHAT DOES QUALITY PLAY LOOK LIKE?

**WHEN YOUR CHILD BUILDS WITH BLOCKS**, she is learning many important skills such as: creativity as she creates a unique structure of her own design; physical development as she develops fine motor skills; and thinking as she explores relationships among object size, shape, and balance.

**WHEN YOU SHARE A BOOK WITH YOUR LITTLE ONE**, you are developing social and emotional skills through parent/child bonding; language and literacy skills as he learns new vocabulary, enjoys hearing stories, and learns to “read” the pictures to see what is happening; and creativity as you supporting the development of his imagination.

## What types of toys support healthy play?

### *A quality infant and toddler toy...*

#### **CAN BE USED IN MANY WAYS**

A quality toy can be used in more than one way and will grow with your child. For example, a set of nesting blocks can be used for many things: filling, dumping and stacking when your toddler is young, and as car garages, towers, for sorting, and homes for animals as she grows!

#### **ENGAGES THE SENSES**

Young babies learn by using all of their senses. They like play that involves materials with a variety of textures, as well as lots of physical contact, singing, and dancing. For older toddlers, playing with sand, finger paint and shaving cream provides opportunities for learning using touch, smell, sight, and sound.

#### **ALLOWS CHILDREN TO USE THEIR IMAGINATIONS**

Look for stuffed animals or dolls that aren't from a TV show, or other media, to allow your child to create her own play ideas. Developing creativity and problem solving skills is important for life long learning.

#### **LETS CHILDREN MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR PLAY**

A quality toy does not do something for the child. Instead, the child finds pleasure and satisfaction from doing something to the toy. For example, a soft and simple doll can do whatever your child imagines, while a battery-operated doll that talks limits what your child might pretend.



### *Create the scene for play:*

Babies and toddlers learn by watching other children play. Provide opportunities for mixed age play experiences.

Create a safe play space where children can move around freely.

Too many toys can make it hard for young children to focus. Provide a few high quality toys and rotate them as children lose interest. Reintroduce them at a later time as “new toys.”

### *Household objects that allow infants and toddlers to play creatively:*

- Small pots and pans
- Wooden spoons
- Clean laundry detergent tops
- Cardboard boxes
- Paper towel rolls
- Measuring spoons, cups
- Plastic tubs with lids (yogurt or margarine containers)

# INFANTS

## (0 - 12 months)

## Play Recommendations

*All children develop at different rates and may flow between age groupings. These recommendations will give you a general idea of how to support your child's development through play.*

**ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG BABIES, YOU ARE THEIR BEST TOY!** Make facial expressions, sing, dance, and gently move their body parts to a rhythm – these are the kinds of rich interactions that help them develop relationships and learn about the world around them.

**SIMPLE RATTLES AND SOFT TOYS ARE PERFECT.** Babies love the satisfying feeling of shaking toys and making noise. When babies shake or touch a toy and then feel and hear the reaction, they learn cause and effect. Other good toys include objects to hang overhead for grasping, noise making toys to kick with feet, teething, and toys with a variety of textures.

**GOOD BOOKS INCLUDE ONES WITH ONE OR TWO CLEAR IMAGES PER PAGE, AND SIMPLE RHYMING STORIES.** Show your baby pictures, and read stories. Allow him to watch your mouth and facial expressions as you read. Name and point to objects on a page for her, but don't worry about finishing a whole story.

**TRY STACKING CUPS AND BLOCKS** and build a tower for your baby to knock over.

**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, PEEK-A-BOO TOYS, AND MIRRORS** will help her master concepts like object permanence, action and reaction.



**CONTAINERS SUCH AS NESTING BLOCKS, SHOE BOXES, OR EMPTY MILK JUGS** are wonderful for stacking, filling, and dumping.

**BIG HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS LIKE A LAUNDRY BASKET OR LARGE BOX** make quick homemade fun for a baby to explore climbing into, pushing and pulling.

**INTERACTING WITH YOUR BABY ABOUT WHAT YOU HEAR, SEE AND SMELL** as you walk around your home or your neighborhood enriches your child's experiences and vocabulary.



# Play Recommendations

# TODDLERS (12-36 months)

**YOUNG TODDLERS ENJOY BASKETS AND BUCKETS** for filling and carrying small toys.

**OPEN-ENDED TOYS SUCH AS BOXES OR BLOCKS CAN BECOME HOUSES, ROADS, CASTLES AND CAVES.**

Provide props such as fabric, animals and vehicles to support your child's different play ideas. Such open-ended materials allow babies, toddlers and children of many ages to play together with the same things!

**PUSH AND PULL TOYS ARE GREAT WAYS TO DEVELOP LARGE MOTOR COORDINATION AND STRENGTH.**

Try small wagons to fill and carry toys, or toy strollers to give animals and dolls a ride. For older toddlers, kicking or throwing balls and riding tricycles help develop coordination. Rolling a ball back and forth is also good for social development as your child learns to notice a playmate and take turns.

**SAND AND WATER PLAY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMAGINATIVE PLAY** as well as motor development.

You can encourage this play by adding small toys such as vehicles, animals, plastic containers, bowls and spoons.

**MUSIC AND SONGS THAT ENCOURAGE REPETITION, RHYTHM, MOVEMENT AND CLAPPING**

bring joy and build motor and language skills. Music can be incorporated into your entire day: play music in the background as you play, make instruments like drums out of big yogurt containers, sing during diaper changes, and have a parade around your house as you sing favorite songs!

**YOUR TODDLER WILL ENJOY POTS, PANS, SPOONS, BROOMS** and other adult objects that are safe for mimic play. Imitating the actions of adults around her is an important way that she tries on various roles. Almost any safe object can become a toy for imaginative play. A banana may become a phone and a blanket can be a tent or cape. Dress up clothes, food and kitchen toys inspire toddlers to pretend. Baby dolls are often a favorite toddler toy for both boys and girls.

**GOOD BOOKS FOR YOUNGER TODDLERS INCLUDE ONES THAT FOCUS ON TOPICS THAT INTEREST THEM, LIKE ANIMALS, FOODS, AND FACES WITH DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS ETC.** You can include books with multiple things on a page, but that are still simple visually. Ask your child to name objects on a page or make animal sounds! For older toddlers, good books are those with repetitive text that allows her to "read" a story herself as well as books that tell stories about familiar experiences such as going to the playground or cooking. Other helpful books encourage skills like potty training, dressing and sharing. Make story time a part of every day. Engage your child with the story by asking questions about what happens next or how the characters are feeling. Encourage her to say familiar words and phrases that appear in the book.

**YOU CAN ALSO MAKE A BOOK WITH PHOTOS OF YOUR CHILD** to encourage language and social/emotional development. For example, you can make a book about going to day care and coming back home; including photos of the things your child loves to do at both places.

A book about being safe can show pictures of your child sitting on her chair, holding your hand outside, and running at the park.

**PUZZLES HELP TODDLERS LEARN TO SOLVE PROBLEMS,**

think flexibly and stick with a task, as well as develop fine motor skills. As your toddler gets older, move from puzzles with large pieces that each have their own spot to puzzles with smaller, interlocking pieces.

**NESTING BLOCKS AND SHAPE SORTERS** can be used independently now as your child's problem-solving skills develop. Also, blocks that connect (such as Mega Blocks and Duplos®) allow young builders to build solid structures.

**OLDER TODDLERS ARE READY TO EXPLORE AND EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH ART** with large pieces of chalk or crayons, or by using glue sticks to make a collage.



*Some toys are very seductive for children and parents. Don't be fooled! Toy companies make you think that you need special toys to help your child learn - watch out for these types of toys:*

#### **...HIGH TECH TOYS AND DVDs**

Toy companies say that watching Baby Einstein, Brainy Baby and similar DVDs helps babies get smarter sooner. But University of Washington researchers found that for every hour spent watching baby DVDs, infants learned six to eight fewer new words than babies who never watched. This is because as babies watch TV they are spending less time interacting with parents or engaging in creative play – two activities that promote learning. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no electronic media before age two. These toys interfere with a young child's developing brain.



## **Infant & Toddler Toys to Avoid**

#### **...FLASHY TOYS WITH LIGHTS AND SOUND**

Generally, the simpler the toy is, the better it is for your child's developing mind. Flashy toys are appealing and may entertain, but limit creativity and discovery which are important building blocks of learning.

*As soon as two-and-a-half year old Jack got to his friend's house he saw a new basketball toy. Hooray! He ran to get a ball and put it right in the hoop. As it went in, Jack heard the toy respond with "Great shot!" and saw the backboard light up. Jack loved it! He approached the toy, touched the lights and then found a little button inside the net – when he pushed it he heard, "Great shot!" again and saw the light show. Even though his mom tried to get him to throw the ball again, Jack stood next to the hoop and pushed the button over and over.*

#### **...TOYS AND OTHER ITEMS BASED ON TV SHOWS**

Even though children want toys that are based on characters from TV shows or movies, these toys encourage consumerism, unhealthy food choices, and limit your child's imagination.

*Serena received a Baby Elmo stuffed animal as a baby gift and her parents had placed it in her crib where she had slept with it every night since. Now at age 18 months, when she and her mother are in the grocery store, and she sees Elmo's face on a box of unhealthy snack food, she cries when her mother will not buy the product.*

## **WARNING: Baby DVDs Can Delay Development!**

The Campaign for Commercial-free Childhood (CCFC) filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) saying there is little research to support these claims made by manufacturers and some research that finds these items can even delay development. In 2008, the FTC agreed with CCFC and told companies to change their false advertising claim. Disney agreed to refund consumers for a limited time. Go to [www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org) to get more information.

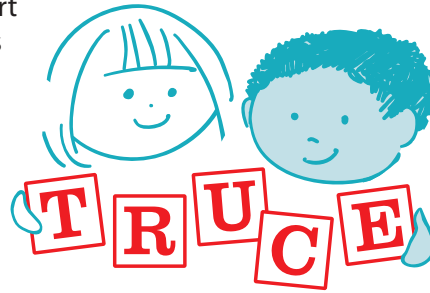
## **Beware of BRANDING!**

Toys, clothing and foods often use a TV character, like from Disney or Sesame Street, to capture young children's attention. Why is this a problem? Whenever kids see it, they want it because it's familiar. These kinds of licensing agreements, which support branding efforts, can lead to unwise buying choices, unhealthy eating habits and nagging.

## TRUCE IS A NATIONAL GROUP OF EDUCATORS

deeply concerned about the impact of children's entertainment and toys on the play and behavior of children. Our goal is to raise public awareness about the negative effects of violent, sexualized, and stereotyped toys and media on children, families, schools, and society. We support parents and teachers in a variety of ways in addressing issues regarding media, toys, and play.

Please contact us: TRUCE, PO Box 441261, Somerville, MA 02144, [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org), [truce@truceteachers.org](mailto:truce@truceteachers.org).



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# Additional Information & Resources

TRUCE thanks Anna Treston for her generous donation allowing for the creation of this guide and Matt Damon for his ongoing, much appreciated support.

**FOR COPYING:** Please visit our website: [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org) for a black and white version of this guide.

## BOOKS

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- Thomas, S. (2007). *Buy, Buy Baby: How Consumer Culture Manipulates Parents and harms Young Minds*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Zigler, E., Singer, D., & Bishop-Josef, S. (Eds.) (2004). *Children's Play: The Roots of Reading*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

## WEBSITES & ORGANIZATIONS

### ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

[www.allianceforchildhood.org](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org)

Advocates for policies and practices that support children's healthy development and play. Published the new report, *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* [Available at the website].

### AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

Prepares position statements and pamphlets on media issues including the recommendation of no TV for children under age 2 years.

### CAMPAIGN FOR COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD

[www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org)

Coalition working to stop marketing practices that harm children. Sign up to participate in its grassroots campaigns. Get the "Baby Scam: Marketing to Infants

and Toddlers" Fact Sheet at [www.http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/factsheets/babies.pdf](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/factsheets/babies.pdf)

### EMPOWERED BY PLAY

[www.empoweredbyplay.org](http://www.empoweredbyplay.org)

A regular blog written by GERALYN BYWATER McLaughlin that provides wonderful play suggestions and current information about media and young children.

### ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

Information and resources on play and very young children, including: Power of Play: Learning Through Play from 0-3, the 3 part series: Your Child at Play (One for each of the first 3 years) by Marilyn Segal, and the monthly From Baby to Big Kid: How Your Child Grows from Zero to Three e-newsletter [Sign up at: [www.zerotothree.org/baby2bigkid](http://www.zerotothree.org/baby2bigkid)].

