

What Makes a Toy Educational?



A toy is educational when it provides a learning experience or advances your child's development. Providing children with educational toys for their particular age group ensures they are offered positive stimulation for physical, emotional and social development. To do this requires a careful balance of play and education because children learn so much through play.

They learn to express themselves with words and with their body. They develop their imagination. They learn to problem-solve, to share, and to cope with frustration. They develop fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. And, they learn about the world around them.

Because a major part of your child's time in the early years and beyond is spent playing, parents need to carefully select toys that teach. A good educational toy will attract your child's attention and provide a positive learning experience. This being said, children need to be taught how to play.

For example, parents cannot expect their toddler to know how to play with a puppet and put on a show. If a parent takes the time to play with a hand puppet with his or her child, it is almost certain that you will have a child that is engaged in a wholesome activity filled with song and laughter.

Make it funny, make it positive and ask some questions as the puppet...you'll love the answers and the positive feedback from your little one. And once a child is old enough, you'll be able to sit back and be the audience.

For a toy to be educational it needs to provide a meaningful learning experience therefore, when selecting toys for your child, consider and evaluate the toy based on age appropriateness as well as what it teaches.

Children need a positive play environment that will allow them to embrace the learning process right from the start. By taking the time to enjoy your child's company and play with them you can follow, supervise and direct your child's development, and find great thrill and amusement in their playtime activities.

A toy that is truly educational will provide the following for your child at any age:

- * **Sensory stimulation:** How many senses will the toy absorb? Does it respond to and with lights, sounds, or movement? Is it colorful? Does it have a smell or a texture?

- * **A positive challenge:** Will the toy provide a challenge without frustrating your child? Will it be a fun and rewarding experience?

- * **Self-expression:** Will the toy allow your child to express himself, be creative and make choices?

- * **Success:** How many "correct" ways are there to play with the toy? Can play be open-ended with no right or wrong responses? Will the toy adapt to your child's ability and style?

- * **Different uses:** Can the toy be manipulated in different ways and for various kinds of play?

- * **Flexibility:** Does it have adjustable volume, speed, and level of difficulty?

- * **Opportunity for interaction:** Can other children be involved in the play? Can the toy help build social skills?

- * **Individuality and growth:** Will the toy engage your child in activities that indicate the child's developmental age and growth? Does it reflect the child's interests?

- * **Safety and durability:** Is the toy durable, considering your child's age and strength? Is it safe?