



Toys and Play: 1 Year-Olds and Young Toddlers

This handout gives guidelines about choosing toys and play activities for young toddlers.

Activities/Abilities

One year olds and toddlers can:

- Exercise and do physical skills
- Lug, dump, push/pull, pile, knock down, empty/fill
- Climb, manage small indoor steps
- Interested in multiple objects
- Kick; catch larger ball by age 2
- String large beads; turn knobs; screw and unscrew by age 2
- Interested in cause/effect
- Prefer action toys
- Make simple block structures
- Use simple stacking toys
- Do simple puzzles
- Are curious, experiment
- Group/match similar toys by age 1½-2
- Identify by pointing
- Enjoy water, sand play
- Make marks on paper; scribbles
- Imitate adult actions – housekeeping, caretaking; tries to do adult tasks
- Play mostly alone
- Show affection
- Likes being read to, hearing nursery rhymes, music
- Enjoy interactive games like tag by age 1½

In General

Child prefers action toys, toys that produce movement or sounds by child's own efforts.

- Toys need not be highly detailed but should be realistic looking.
- Toys should be lightweight for easy lifting, carrying.
- Bright colors preferred.

In play, child is always on the move—large muscle activities such as running, climbing dominate over small muscle activities such as exploring objects, constructing.

Active

Push and Pull Toys

- Push toys with rods (rods with large handles on ends)
- Toys to push on floor – simple, sturdy, with large wheels
- Special noise/action effects
- For steady walkers, pull toys on short strings (broad-based to tip less easily)

From about 1½:

- Simple doll strollers; wagons (low, open, big enough for child to get in)
- Small rocking horses – confined to rocking arc, stout handles rather than reins, knee-height of child
- Push/pull toys filled with multiple objects

Continued

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Ride-on Toys

- Ride-ons propelled by pushing with feet – no steering mechanism
- Stable ride-ons – four or more wheels, wheels spaced wide apart, child's feet flat on floor when seated
- Ride-ons that make noise, look like animals, have storage bins

Outdoor/Gym Equipment

- Low, soft climbing platforms, tunnels for crawling
- Swings (pushed by adult) – with curved or body-shaped seats (use safety straps)

From about 1½:

- Simple, low climbing structures
- Low slides with handrails
- Outdoor play equipment with fixed rather than moving parts

Sports Equipment

- Soft, lightweight balls, especially with visual effects, noises, unpredictable movement
- Large balls (easier for child to maneuver)

From about 1½:

- Interest in small rubber balls (at least 1 ¼ inches in diameter)

Manipulative Constructive Toys

- Small lightweight blocks (15-25 pieces)

Before 1½, most interlocking mechanisms are too difficult; from about 1 ½:

- Solid wooden unit blocks (20-40)
- Large, hollow building blocks; large, plastic or paper bricks

Puzzles

- Simple pre-puzzles, form boards – 2-3 pieces, each piece a familiar shape

From about 1½:

- 3-5 piece puzzles with easy-to-use knobs (knobs firmly attached)

Pattern-Making Toys

- Peg board with a few large pegs

Manipulative Toys

- Activity boxes attached to crib or play-pen or freestanding – simple action mechanisms (doors, lids, switches)
- Hidden object toys
- Simple pop-up toys operated by pushing a button or knob
- Nesting cups – round shape, few pieces
- Simple stacking toys – few pieces, no order
- Shape sorters – a few common shapes

From about 1½:

- Fit-together toys of about 5 pieces
- Activity boxes with more complex actions – turning knobs, dials, keys
- Pounding/hammering toys
- Nesting and stacking toys
- Simple matching toys
- Simple number/counting boards (1-5) with large pegs
- Jack-in-the-box toys (adult supervision if toys spring back quickly)

Dressing, Lacing, Stringing Toys

- Large colored beads (fewer than 10)

From about 1½:

- Lacing cubes or board

Sand and Water Play Toys

- Simple floating toys – 1-2 pieces
- Small shovel and pail

Continued

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From about 1½:

- Nesting tub toys; bathtub activity centers
- Funnels, colanders

Make-Believe

Dolls

- Soft-bodied or all-rubber baby dolls
- Simple dolls – no hair, moving eyes or movable limbs
- Dolls to fit easily in child's arms, or small dolls (5-6 inches)
- Simple items for caretaking – bottle, blanket
- Simple doll clothes, need not be detachable

From about 1½:

- Small peg people

Stuffed Toys

- Very soft, lightweight, easy-to-hold; slender limbs for easy grasp
(no whiskers, buttons, bows, bells, small plastic parts)

Puppets

- Puppets operated by adult

From about 1½:

- Small hand or finger puppets sized to fit child's hand
- Soft, plush puppets that double as stuffed toys

Role-Play Materials

- Toy phone; full-length mirror
- Simple housekeeping props
- Simple doll equipment – stroller, bed

From about 1 ½:

- Simple dress-ups – hats, shoes, jewelry
- Role-play toys that can be pushed and make noise – mowers, vacuums
- Child-sized stove/oven, fridge (large boxes work well); sink, table and chairs

Play Scenes

Before 1 ½:

- Child may enjoy handling, carrying around figures

From about 1½:

- Familiar, realistic scenes – farms, airport, garage, not too detailed; not lots of pieces
- Prefer scenes with moving parts or that make noise

Transportation Toys

- Lightweight vehicles of a size for easy handling (not too small)
- Push or pull cars and trains (not metal)
- Vehicles that make noise
- First train – 1-2 cars, no tracks, simple or no coupling system

From about 1½:

- More detailed vehicles – doors, hoods that open

Creative Musical Instruments

- Rhythm instruments that can be shaken – bells, rattles

From about 1½:

- Rhythm instruments that can be banged together – cymbals, drums

Art and Craft Materials

- Large canvas
- Sturdy, large-sized paper
- Large crayons (non-toxic)

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Audio-Visual Equipment

Operated by adult:

- Tapes and CDs of nursery rhymes and rhythms
- Hand-cranked music box, worked by child if crank is large, easy to turn

Learning

Games

Not suited to age group.

Specific Skill Development Toys

Not suited to age group.

Books

- Sturdy cloth, plastic, board books with few pages
- Picture books, nursery rhymes, stories with repetition
- Books to be held and read by adult can be more fragile, with paper pages

From about 1½:

- Touch-me or tactile books

Children play from the moment they're born. They need to play, because play is how they learn about themselves and their world. It's how they develop and practice the physical, intellectual and social skills they'll need in life.

But choosing toys need not be a stressful task. Play is mostly fun, and selecting playthings can be too, once you know some basics about play and safety.

Safety

Toys should meet safety regulations for age:

- Sturdy, non-breakable; not likely to break into small pieces; strong enough for child to stand on or in
- Non-toxic materials
- No sharp points or edges
- Too large to be lodged in windpipe, ears, nostrils
- No detachable small parts
- No parts that could pinch or entrap fingers, toes, hair
- Not put together with easily exposed straight pins, sharp wires, nails
- No electrical parts
- Use the right safety equipment when needed (helmets, life vests, knee pads, etc.)

Nothing can take the place of careful supervision.

For More Information

- Your health care provider
- **Children's Resource Line:**
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- www.seattlechildrens.org

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

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