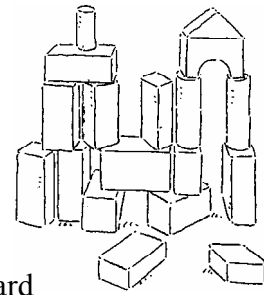


Toys and Play: Preschoolers



This handout gives some guidelines about choosing toys and play activities for preschoolers.

In General

Preschoolers prefer toys with realistic detail, working parts, and construction activities with a plan or goal.

They have an increased interest in dramatic, group pretend play. At about age 5 is the peak period for dramatic play with props, puppet play, play scenes, small figures, cars.

Activities/Abilities

- Runs, jumps, climbs, balances with ease
- Gross motor skills well developed by age 5
- Likes risks, tests of strength and skill, acrobatics, outdoor equipment
- Finger control increases
- Expert builder with small construction materials
- Knows common shapes and sizes
- Interest in simple number activities; alphabet play; copying letters; matching/sorting
- Begins to be goal-oriented; *by about age 4*: makes use of a plan
- Interest in producing designs; including puzzles
- Prefers realism—interested in science, nature, time, how things work
- Plays out adult jobs with costumes, props
- Begins to share, take turns; not ready for competitive play; hates to lose

- Enjoys simple board games based on chance, not strategy
- More sex differentiation in roles, interests
- Enjoys books, being read to

By about age 5:

- Play is cooperative
- Basic interest in ball games with simple rules and scoring

Active

Push and Pull Toys

- Wagons, small wheelbarrows, strollers
- Push toys resembling adult tools—lawnmowers, vacuums, shopping carts

Ride-on Toys

- Tricycles sized to child (have child wear helmet) 3 and 4-wheeled pedal toys
- Vehicles with steering mechanisms; prefer realistic, detailed vehicles
- Full-size rocking horse

From age 4:

- Low-slung tricycles (have child wear helmet)
- Battery-operated ride-ons

From age 5:

- Small bicycle—training wheels, footbrakes, sized to child (have child wear helmet)

Outdoor/Gym Equipment

- Fixed outdoor climbing equipment (with adult supervision)
- Slides (with side rails) and ladders

Children's

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Outdoor/Gym Equipment, continued

From age 4:

- Swings with curved, soft seats (may still need adult to push)
- Balance board
- Equipment with movable parts
- Swings with flat seats, rope ladders and ropes

Sports Equipment

- Balls of all shapes, sizes
- Sleds sized to child (no handbrakes or steering wheels)

From age 4:

- Lightweight soft baseball and bat, junior-sized soccer ball, football
- Speed-graded roller skates (plastic wheels, no ball bearings)

From age 5:

- Jump ropes
- Skis or snowboard (sized to child)
- Flying disks (especially lightweight ones)
- Magnetic darts

Make Believe

Construction Toys

- Large and small solid wood unit blocks, large hollow blocks, plastic bricks

From age 4:

- Most types of interlocking building systems, pieces of all sizes
- No motorized parts

From age 5:

- Prefer sets that make realistic models
- Can connect pieces in specific order to create simple models

Puzzles

- Fit-in, framed or simple jigsaw puzzles—
age 3: up to 20 pieces;
age 4: 20-30 pieces;
age 5: up to 50 pieces

Pattern-Making Toys

- Bead-stringing—longer, thinner string (with stiff tip), large beads
- Peg board with small pegs, magnetic boards with shapes
- Color cubes/color forms

From age 4:

- Beginning interest in design materials—mosaic blocks, felt boards

From age 5:

- Simple weaving, small beads to string

Manipulative Toys

- Matching/sorting toys by color, shape, or picture; *from age 4:* by concept, letters (ABCs), numbers (1-10)
- Nesting toys with multiple pieces

From age 4:

- Geometrical concept toys

From age 5:

- Simple models of mechanical devices or natural objects, matching toys

Dressing, Lacing, Stringing Toys

- Frames/cards to button, hook, tie

From age 5:

- Simple sewing kits, use plastic needles (with adult supervision)

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Sand and Water Play Toys

- Sandbox tools, bubbles
- Wind-up bath toys, bath activity centers

From age 4:

- Sand molds, water pumps
- Realistic working models of boats (no sharp metal parts)
- Pool and water toys (with adult supervision)

Make Believe

Dolls

- Realistic dolls with detail and accessories, especially baby dolls
- Dolls with hair, moving eyes, movable limbs

From age 5:

- Child-proportioned dolls (can dress dolls if clothes, fastenings are simple)
- Paper dolls to be punched out

Stuffed Toys

- Stuffed toys with accessories—ribbons, bells, simple clothes
- Realistic-looking toys, replicas of famous characters

From age 5:

- Collecting toys in sets

Puppets

- Simple sock or mitten puppets, finger puppets
- Simple puppet theater (no scenery)

From age 5:

- Hand-and-arm puppets, more detailed puppets, puppets with limbs

Role-Play Materials

- Dress-ups, costumes of all types, play stage, large mirror
- Realistic, detailed equipment—*by age 5*: want it to really work
- Housekeeping and cooking equipment
- Toy phone, toy camera, doctor kits

Play Scenes

- Scenes with a variety of realistic accessories and working parts
- Favorite themes—garage, farm, airport, space, fort, action/adventure sets
- First dollhouse—simple, easy access, sturdy furnishings

From age 5:

- Can handle very small pieces, attention to realistic detail

Transportation Toys

- Large-scale trucks, road machinery that really works (dumps, digs)
- Action/adventure vehicle sets, small, realistic trains, cars of all sizes

From age 5:

- Small trains with tracks—can work most train coupling systems

Creative

Musical Instruments

- All rhythm instruments
- Xylophones or piano—one-finger tunes
- Blowing instruments—harmonica, horns, whistles, simple recorder

Art and Craft Materials

- Crayons, chalk, magic markers (non-toxic)
- Finger and tempera paint, adjustable easel, brushes of various sizes

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Art and Craft Materials, continued

- Molding clay/dough, including modeling clay and tools
- Scissors with rounded ends
- Paste, glue or gluestick
- Simple block printing equipment, sponge paints
- Pop-it beads, beads to string, simple sewing kits (plastic needles)

From age 4:

- Increased interest in art products
- Workbench and hammer, nails, saw (with adult supervision/wear safety glasses or goggles)

From age 5:

- Smaller crayons, coloring books; watercolor paints, simple weaving

Audio-Visual Equipment

- Hand-cranked music boxes
- Adult-operated CD and tape player

From age 4:

- CD and tape players for child to operate
- Simple video games

From age 5:

- Radios

Learning

Games

- Dominoes (color or number)
- Simple matching/lotto games based on colors, pictures, picture bingo

From age 4:

- First board games, based on chance—few rules, simple scoring
- Games requiring simple fine-motor skills (picking up or balancing)

Specific Skill Development Toys

- Simple electronic and other teaching toys for matching/sorting, shapes, colors, numbers and letters

From age 4:

- Simple computer programs for teaching color matching, letters, classification, numbers, sounds
- Simple science models

From age 5:

- Science materials—magnets, flashlight, shells and rocks, magnifying glass, stethoscope, prism, aquarium, terrarium
- Clocks
- Simple calculators, computer programs to teach simple programming

Books

- Picture books, simple stories, rhymes
- Complex pop-up books
- Complex illustrations with lots of detail
- Age-specific interests—**age 3:** here-and-now stories, animal stories, alphabet books, words and rhymes; **age 4:** wild stories, silly humor, information books, familiar places and people; **age 5:** realistic stories, poetry, primers, animals who behave like people



Toys and Play: Preschoolers

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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