Age-Appropriate Play

Description/Introduction
At different ages and stages of development, children enjoy different activities. Choose toys and activities that match the child’s stage of development to prevent the child from becoming frustrated and to keep the child safe.

What to Do

Younger Infant (0–5 months)

A rattle is a great toy for a young infant to play with, since they typically like objects they can explore with their hands and mouths. In addition, they usually enjoy:

- Brightly colored toys with contrasting colors and simple designs.
- Playing with and looking at hanging objects (like mobiles).
- Soft dolls and animals.
- Play mirrors.
- Being read to and looking at books, especially cloth books.

Older Infant (6–12 months)

A toy truck would be appropriate for an older infant. In addition to toys that can be pushed and pulled, older infants tend to like:

- Toys that move and make noise, like rattles.
- Things that open and shut and contain items.
- Items that can be stacked or poured.
- Objects that can be squeezed, dropped, poked, twisted or thrown.
- Appearing and disappearing objects.
- Floor activity centers and activity quilts.
- Being read to and looking at books.

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Toddler

A play train like this one should be interesting to toddlers, since they usually like playing with toys in pretend scenes. You could give the following toys to a toddler:

- Stuffed animals and dolls that can be carried around
- Simple dress-up items
- Toys that can be pushed, pulled or that make noise
- Action toys that the toddler can make do things (like push a button and have a siren go off)
- Toys with bright colors that look real
- Things that can be lugged, dumped, pushed, pulled, piled up, knocked down, emptied or filled

Toddlers also enjoy:

- Showing off physical skills, such as climbing, hanging, rolling and galloping.
- Arranging things (by number, size or other pattern).
- Role-playing with toys and imitating grown-ups.
- Being read to and looking at books.

Preschooler

A doll is a good toy for a preschooler to play with. At this age, children usually like the following activities as well:

- Making and constructing things
- Nontoxic art supplies
- Toys that are realistic and have working parts
- Cars, play scenes and small figures
- Pretending or playing make-believe using things like play money or telephones
- Dress-up
- Simple board games
- Physical activities like running, jumping, climbing, catching, throwing, kicking and riding a tricycle. (Make sure the child wears a helmet while riding a tricycle.)
- Being read to and looking at books

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Younger School-Age Child

Playing cards would be most enjoyed by a younger school-age child. Along with card and board games, children at this age are also entertained by:

- Putting on shows.
- Hobbies and collections.
- Arts and crafts kits.
- Playing sports, jumping rope and skipping.
- Dramatic play (involving props, costumes and puppets).
- Miniature dolls and action figures.
- Games with two or more players.
- Friends.

Older School-Age Child

A soccer ball would be perfect to entertain an older school-age child. While many children in this age range are interested in sports, they also tend to enjoy:

- Magic.
- Hand-held electronic games and devices.
- Hobbies and model kits.
- Friends.
- Games with many players.
- Board and card games.
- Musical instruments and lessons.