



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

Simple toys best for young kids' learning *and* your wallet

Thanksgiving is barely over and already we're bombarded with ads heralding the latest learning toys for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. These toys promise fantastic educational rewards, sometimes with a price tag to match.

Turns out, the toys that can be most beneficial to children's learning are also budget friendly. First Things First has compiled this list of simple toys that appeal to the way the brains of young kids learn; for example:

- **Infants (under 1 year old)** - Babies are fascinated by their surroundings, especially faces and bright colors. Older babies start moving around and experimenting with holding, moving and throwing objects. Toys that stimulate that initial curiosity include: board books; toys where touch creates sounds, flashing lights, etc.; safe, chewable toys; and, toys with mirrors. For older babies, toys they can push or pull and soft blocks are also appropriate.
- **Toddlers (1-3 years old)** - Toddlers are on the move. They start experimenting with words and test their muscles with climbing and jumping. They can also figure simple things out for themselves. Toys that encourage imagination and problem-solving include: books; pretend versions of everyday objects; toys to ride on or climb on; balls to roll or catch; and, building-type toys, including fill and dump varieties. For older toddlers, matching and sorting toys; large crayons or markers with plain paper; simple puzzles; and, musical toys are also appropriate.
- **Preschoolers (3-5 years old)** - Preschoolers are ready for more physical play. They are building their vocabulary and learning to get along with others - including sharing, taking turns and following the rules. Older preschoolers may be ready for simple concepts like numbering, letter sounds and reading basic words. Toys that help preschoolers relate to each other and the world around them include: books; toys that encourage imaginative play, like dress-up clothes and kid-size furniture; simple board games; counting and letter games; sports equipment suitable to their size; musical instruments, and, art supplies, including play dough, safety scissors, glue, etc.

By engaging in our children's play and choosing gifts that promote creativity, we can help our kids build the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. And, that's the gift that keeps on giving!