

Recd. 10,000-10-15-70

# FACT SHEET

L-924

## Play and Play Materials

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### *"They're just playing!"*

It's with such a statement that grownups often underestimate children's play. But to children, playing is the most serious thing in all the world. It is their way of learning, experimenting, and finding out about the world. Play does far more good than keeping children amused, out of mischief or out of the way.

### Values of Children's Play

- Helps children understand activities around them; they learn by doing, by experimenting with reality.
- Helps develop personality traits—cooperation, sharing, fair play, dependability, neatness and orderliness, alertness, resourcefulness, initiative.
- Develops physical abilities.
- Gives opportunity to find out about physical environment—size, shape, color, weight, texture.
- Is a channel for expressing thoughts and feelings; by listening to children at play you may learn to understand their feelings about themselves, others and their world.
- Develops a sense of ownership and property rights.
- Develops joy in creative ability; to make, to do, to create, to take apart and remake, gives satisfaction and happiness.
- Gives practice in problem solving; by trying various solutions, the child learns to concentrate, to think with a purpose, and to make decisions.

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### Types of Play Equipment

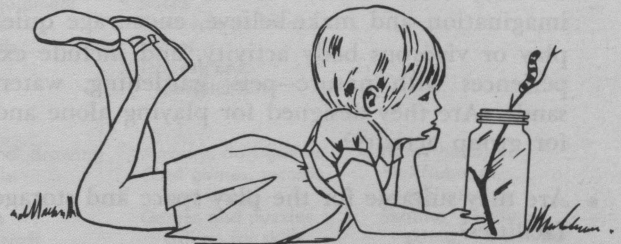
Be sure to select play equipment that meets the child's needs and fits his development at any given stage. Day by day a child grows. Different abilities develop, skills increase, and interests broaden. Play which at first was largely individual becomes more and more social.

Children need a variety of toys, but some children have too many playthings. Variety in type is more important than quantity. Materials from each of the following four groups will satisfy a child's growing interests.

**Active, physical play.** Balls, tricycles, gym equipment and wagons aid in physical development.

**Manipulative, constructive, creative play.** Blocks, construction toys, clay, drawing and painting equipment are typical aids to this type of play. They give children opportunity for expressing ideas, trying out new ones, and for developing initiative and resourcefulness.

**Imitative, imaginative, dramatic play.** Dolls, housekeeping equipment, farms and farm equipment, animals, trains, filling stations, and dress-up



costumes are typical of toys that stimulate imaginative and dramatic play. The child learns to understand the world around him through imitating and dramatizing adult activities.

**Social play.** Play in which several children can take part is helpful to social development. Such playthings as doll equipment, blocks, a teeter or a wagon are more usable and more fun when two children play together. By sharing play activities, children learn the traits of fair play and good sportsmanship, how to get along with each other, and how to think quickly and accurately.

Toys and play equipment need not be the most expensive or even purchased; children like homemade toys, too. In fact, a young child often prefers his mother's pots and pans, canned goods or some scraps of cloth, to toys purchased for him.

### Selecting Play Materials

You want to provide the best equipment for the child's development as well as get the most value for the money you spend. When choosing toys, ask yourself these questions:

- Are they strong, durable, safe, sanitary, and attractive?
- Are they easy to keep clean?
- Are they simple in construction—not too large, too small, too heavy or too difficult to handle?
- Can they be used in a variety of ways? (Mechanical toys limit the things a child can do with them.)
- Can the child manage them himself?
- Are they suited to the child's stage of development?
- Do they offer variety for his needs, stimulate imagination and make-believe, encourage quiet play or vigorous body activity, and include experiences with nature—pets, gardening, water, sand? Are they designed for playing alone and for group activity?
- Are they suitable for the play space and storage facilities?
- Do they require a minimum of adult supervision?

### Age is Important

There are general suggestions for selecting toys for different age groups, but it is best to know the particular child for which you are buying. If that isn't possible, some toys are usable for several years. Dolls, cars, wagons, blocks, and outdoor equipment are examples.

Since manufacturers study toy selection, you may find toy labels or catalog descriptions which give information about educational value, suitability for a specific age, how the child can use it, why he will enjoy it, and how he can profit by playing with it.

For general toy suggestions for children of different ages, see opposite page.

### Care of Play Materials

One thing a child learns as he plays is that he must take care of his play materials. This helps him acquire habits of neatness, orderliness, self-reliance and responsibility. This training should begin quite early because it is easier to establish good habits from the beginning than to correct bad ones.

Here are a few ways to help your children learn to care for their playthings:

- Remember that the younger the child, the more *help* he needs in putting his toys away. The preschool child needs quite a bit of help.
- The child needs *time* to put his things away. Remind him to do this ahead of the time when the play period is to end.
- Provide a convenient *place* for storage. Toys shouldn't be dumped in a box. With open shelves or crates, the child can see what he has to play with and can make a choice.
- It is better if the young child doesn't have too many things to play with at one time. You might save some toys for special occasions, or alternate the use of the toys.
- Encourage children to put one set of things away before getting out others, unless the new playthings will be used in the same activity.
- If a toy is misused, you may wish to make a casual explanation of your action and remove the toy. As soon as the child shows willingness to use the toy properly, return it.

## Toy suggestions for children of different age groups

### BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS

#### INFANCY

Balls  
Bath toys  
Colored wooden or plastic beads  
Rattles  
Soft dolls  
Washable animals

#### 1 TO 2 YEARS

Balls  
Blocks to pile up and knock over  
Nest of blocks  
Picture books about animals or children  
Pounding sets  
Push and pull toys  
Small wagon  
Stuffed animals

#### 2 TO 3 YEARS

These children are still interested in many of the things listed in the previous group. In addition, they like:

Cars  
Dolls  
Doll equipment  
Large picture books  
Low swing  
Sand box and sand toys  
Set of blocks  
Train without a track

#### 3 TO 4 YEARS

Blackboard  
Blocks  
Blunt scissors  
Clay  
Dolls, doll carriages  
Farm animals  
Housekeeping equipment  
Paints

Puzzles  
Records  
Table and chair sets  
Tools  
Tricycle  
Trucks and cars  
Unbreakable dishes

#### 4 TO 6 YEARS

Blunt scissors  
Books  
Climbing apparatus  
Cowboy and Indian accessories  
Doctor and nurse sets  
Dolls, doll equipment  
Equipment for store play  
Farm animals  
Garden equipment  
Hammer

Paints, clay  
Puzzles  
Records  
Simple construction toys  
Simple games  
Slides, swings  
Tractors  
Trains, trucks, cranes, planes  
Wagons, tricycle, sled

#### 6 TO 8 YEARS

At this age, boys and girls begin to have different interests, although they still play together much of the time.

#### BOYS

Ball-playing equipment  
Construction sets  
Marbles  
Science toys  
Tools  
Trains

#### GIRLS

Dolls and house-keeping equipment  
Jumping rope  
Miniature dolls  
Paper dolls

#### BOYS AND GIRLS

Bicycles  
Books  
Games of all kinds  
Skates  
Trapeze and parallel bars

#### 8 TO 10 YEARS

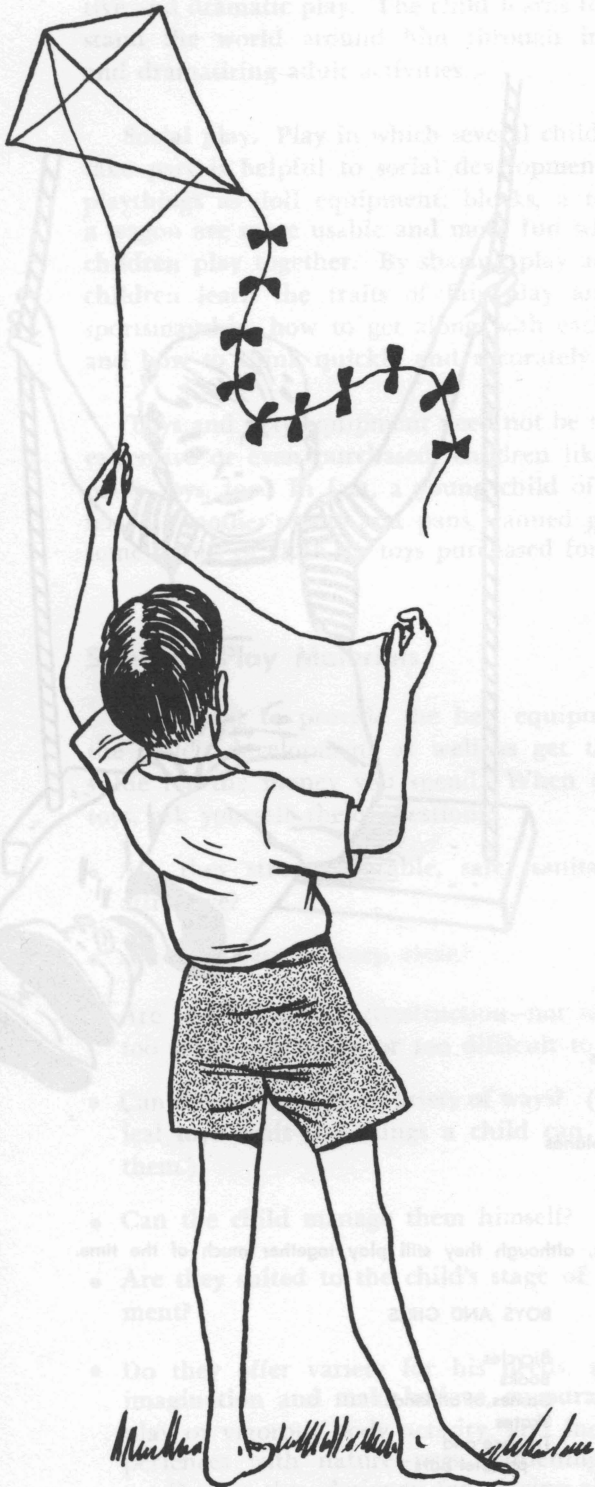
Boxing gloves  
Carpentry tools  
Gym equipment  
Kites, stilts  
More difficult construction sets  
Railroad systems

Designing and drawing  
Making simple clothes for themselves  
Simple handicraft activities

Archery, dart games  
Card games, records and books  
Games and puzzles calling for skills learned in school

Many hobbies  
Shuffleboard, table tennis  
Skating, sledding, skiing, swimming





## Guiding Children's Play

The amount and kind of guidance in play depends on a number of things, but particularly on the ages of the children. Very young children need someone fairly near them most of the time. In fact, they want to be near you and your work. Later, you can be in the background.

Every child should spend some time playing with other children. Although he learns a great deal from this, sharing and cooperation don't come right away. The child first plays alongside other children, not actually with them. So if children are under three years old, they need toys alike—balls, trucks, or dolls—if they are to play happily.

If difficulties arise, you may stop the activity, re-direct it, or let the children work it out themselves. The method to use depends on the ages of the children, and whether or not you have all the facts. Older children often can work out their own problems in playing, and learn from doing it.

## A Few Final Hints

Play and play materials are very important aids in growing up. The key to children's play is providing what they need when they need it. Unfortunately for many youngsters, this is neglected or left to chance. For the best development of personality, children should have the opportunity to experiment with many different activities.

The lure of the toy counter is sometimes overwhelming. So, before you buy, ask yourself:

- What will this toy do for the child?
- Why should he be interested in it?
- How long will he be interested in it?

Information adapted from **PLAY AND PLAY MATERIALS**, circular 556, Cooperative Extension Programs, University Extension, The University of Wisconsin.