



The Autism Program
Children's Specialized Hospital
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TIPS FOR SELECTING TOYS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

- Purchase toys that are appropriate for the child's development age, not necessarily the chronological age listed on the box by the manufacturers
- Pay attention to the "Choking Hazards" on the boxes even beyond the age of 3. Try buying toys that are all in one piece versus many small pieces to avoid the risk of choking since some kids with autism engage in pica (eating non-food items).
- Avoid objects/toys that can be smashed if dropped. This is especially helpful if the child has frequent temper tantrums.
- Some kids with autism enjoy tearing or ripping paper. To avoid depriving them of books, you can buy the stiffer board books or plastic books
- Too many toys may be overwhelming for a child with autism. It is helpful for them to concentrate on one thing at a time. It may be preferable to buy a few larger toys as opposed to many smaller toys.
- As an alternative to toys, consider giving things like tickets or memberships to museums, zoos, wildlife trusts where the child may have a special interest. Make sure the child would enjoy a visit to the place and not feel that it is too over stimulating.
- Do not despair if toys you've picked don't seem to interest the child right away. Try them again at a later date, or try to determine why the child does not like the toy and see if it can be adapted. For example, if the child dislikes the toy because it is too noisy, can the sound be muted or disconnected. etc
- Try to buy toys, computers, games, that are multi-sensory to better encourage learning. However, be careful not to get a toy or game that is too difficult or frustrating
- Buy toys that are related to the child's likes (special interests)
- "Mainstream" toys may be helpful because they are familiar to other kids and may encourage socialization
- Specially designed "therapeutic toys" may be helpful because they may focus on a specific skill.
- Try to balance instructional/therapeutic toys with favorite types of toys
- Not all kids have the same likes/dislikes so check with the child and family when unsure

Common “likes” may include:

- Technical objects (calculators, CD players, video recorders and computers)
- Toys that work at a push of a button
- Water toys (simple objects like plastic cups and spoons can be fun for pouring and mixing)
- Bubbles
- Toys that promote sensory experiences like shaving cream and foam that can be used in the bath or sink
- Flashlights
- Cause-and-effect toys like a ramp with toy cars or marbles (if child is not at risk for choking on toy)
- Swings, hippity-hops, Sit and Spins can help provide vestibular input and help child with their gross motor skills
- Toys that are visually stimulating such as those with a “screen or that light up
- Toys that can be played alone and don’t require social interaction
- Vibrating toys and massagers
- Lego’s for older children and Duplo’s for younger children (many autistic children enjoy building and creating different structures)
- A video or DVD of a movie or show that they like.
- Clothing that they like
- Riding toys or bicycles (tandem bicycles are also recommended). Bicycles can help learn the rules of the road as well as get the benefit of exercise.
- “Sit and spins” may help children with their gross motor skills and channel self-stimulatory activity in a more functional way
- Puzzles help additional joint compression by snapping the pieces together as well as help with interest in touch
- Board games and CD’s. Simple board games, like Candyland, may help promote socialization
- Include tactile toys such as Koosh balls, stretchy toys, gel balls. If your child tends to mouth objects, these types of toys are not recommended.
- Musical Blocks
- Computer software like “Thinkin’ Things” by Edmark or “Living Books” by Broderbund
- Sing-A-Long videos or animated books

Common Dislikes may include:

- Some kids are very sensitive to texture of clothes and may dislike being given clothes as a gift
- Some children with autism are hypersensitive to sounds and may dislike toys with unpredictable noise or noise at certain sound frequencies. They may be more receptive to classical music
- Don't purchase games that require a lot of people to play as the social demands may be too great. Find toys that can be played both when a child wants to be alone or with other people, allowing for social integration

Books which feature characters with autism:

- Of Mice and Aliens by Kathy Hoopman. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Tobin Learns to Make Friends by Diane Murrell. Future Horizons Publishers
- Asperger's Huh?: A Child's Perspective by Rosina Scnurr. Anisor Publishers
- Blue Bottle Mystery: An Asperger's Adventure by Kathy Hoopman. Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Lisa and the Lacemaker: An Asperger's Adventure by Kathy Hoopman. Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Trevor Trevor by Dr. Diane Twachtman-Cullen
- Andy and His Yellow Frisbee by Mary Thompson. Woodbine House.

Books for siblings of kids with autism:

- All about My Brother by Sarah Peralta. Autism Asperger Publishing
- Everyone is Different: A Book for Young People who have Brothers or Sisters with Autism by Fiona Bleach. Autism Asperger's Publishers
- Ian's Walk: A Story about Autism by Laurie Lears & Karen Ritz. Albert Whitman & Co.
- My Friend with Autism: A Coloring Book for Peers and Siblings by B & C. Bishop. Future Horizons
- Sometimes My Brother: Helping Kids Understand Autism through a Sibling's Eyes by Angie Healy. Future Horizons, 2005

Resources/Websites related to Toys for Autistic Children

- www.dragonflytoys.com
- www.stars4kidz.com
- www.specialkids1.com
- www.ozmofun.com
- www.specialneedstoys.com
- www.especiallymine.com
- www.babybumblebee.com
- www.myfavoritetoys.com/autism_thomas.php
- www.ableplay.org
- www.lekotek.org
- www.discoverytoysinc.com
- www.pfot.com
- www.therapysshoppe.com
- www.theraproducts.com
- www.sensorycomfort.com
- www.fhautism.com
- www.woodbinehouse.com