

Early Learning Parents' Pages

December 2017



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- ❁ How to select gifts for little ones
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Toys for your little ones

Infants or toddlers. Here are some tips to help you choose gifts they will like and so will you.

You may be confused by all the gifts in catalogues and online for infants and babies. If toys have to be controlled or held by an adult, don't buy them. You want to find toys that are safe and stimulating for babies. Consider the way your child is developing when buying or suggesting gifts for her. Toys for infants and toddlers should help them connect with family members and care givers. You want to buy or recommend gifts that support your child's physical, social-emotional and cognitive development.

From birth to 6 months, your baby's vision is developing rapidly and she is using her eyes to connect with the world around her. She will prefer toys with strong color contrast such as black, white and red at first, then primary colors (red, blue, yellow) and secondary colors (orange, green and purple). Infants enjoy mobiles, brightly colored rattles and soft toys that make gentle noises. She is beginning to respond to sounds and will enjoy musical toys or make sounds. Rattles, baby-safe mirrors, small stuffed animals or dolls, teething toys and soft balls (small, but big enough so they will not fit in her mouth) are good toys.

At 6 months your baby will begin exploring her surroundings more, start to communi-

cate through sounds and begin to learn words. You will find she loves repetition and will repeat actions and sounds over and over. Toys that encourage repetition such as rattles, soft blocks, toy musical instruments and busy boxes make good gifts for babies her age.

Your baby is developing physical skills quickly and will enjoy toys she can explore such as plastic buckets to fill and dump, a ring stack or stacking cups, a simple shape sorter or jack-in-the-box. She is crawling and cruising so will like push-and-pull toys, chunky cars and trucks, a toy vacuum, toy lawn mower or large plastic balls.



At this age, your child is still putting everything in her mouth, so make sure her toys are made of safe, washable materials and big enough not to fit in her mouth. Do not buy toys with small pieces that may come off and become choking hazards.

Don't forget books! You need to read to your child daily beginning at birth. Sturdy board books and plastic books are great because your baby will want to put the books in her mouth. Look through the books, talk about the pictures and read books to your child as often as possible. New books make wonderful gifts for babies.

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Make your own holiday traditions

The holiday season brings back childhood memories such as your favorite holiday traditions. Sharing the special things you did as a child, will help **your** child learn about family traditions. She may not realize that some traditions are specific to your family and may think every family reads the special story you read together during the holidays or that everyone lights candles or has the special treat your family enjoys. Tell her how these traditions began and why they are special. Share different holiday foods, treats or songs you remember as a child. Sharing these with her makes connections between the generations in your family. Just as bedtime and morning routines help create emotional security for your child, family traditions do, too, and they create lifelong memories.

If your family did not have holiday traditions you enjoyed, begin creating some now. It is never too late to make new traditions. Talk with your family about renewing or revamping old traditions.

Create a "countdown to the special day." Make a calendar with a special activity or have a favorite treat for each day. Make holiday decorations or treats together. Or, as a family, help those less fortunate during the holidays. Let your child select food or gifts to donate to charity. Emphasize acts of kindness your family members can do for each other as a tradition. Talk about your family's culture and



Talk With Me Baby

Research shows that the number of loving words your child hears in his first three years has a big impact on his vocabulary and early literacy skills. [Eighty-five percent of your child's brain growth](#) happens in the first three years of his life. If you spend time talking, singing and reading with your child each day, by the time he begins kindergarten he will have double the vocabulary of a child whose parents do not talk and read with them daily.

To help parents learn about the importance of talking with their child starting at birth, *Talk With Me Baby* has developed an array of resources families can use to support their children's language development. You can find them at the [Talk With Me Baby website](#).

There are resources for families and child care providers that include videos, information and ways to track developmental milestones, tips to use anytime and anywhere, and a soon-to-be released app with tips you can use on-the-go. You will be able to download the free app to get weekly lessons and talking tips, track your baby's milestones and share your experiences with other parents who are doing similar activities with their babies.

Here are some things you can do.

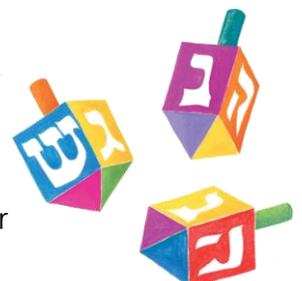
- [Learn the importance of talking](#) with your child to support his language development.
- Watch [short videos](#) that will help you understand the ways you can support your child's language development.
- Learn about your [child's brain development and milestones](#).
- Download the soon to be released [free app](#) to get weekly lessons, track your child's milestones, get talking tips, and share your own experiences communicating with others about their experiences with their children.

Talk With Me Baby resources are also available in [Spanish](#).



cook special recipes or make decorations specific to your culture.

Think of the things that your family enjoys and the values you want your child to embrace as you select the holiday traditions you want to keep and new traditions you may want to start with your family.



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Picking the right

The holiday season is here and family members are asking you what you would recommend as a gift for your toddler.

Do you rely on advertisements, recommendations from friends and family members, or toy store promotions for suggestions? If so, you may want to consider other factors when buying or recommending gifts for your child. *Zero to Three* has guidelines to help you [select toys for your toddler](#) that will keep her engaged, grow with your child and support her development.

Your toddler is curious, likes to explore, enjoys active play and likes to imitate adults and other children. She will enjoy toys that can she can play with alone or with others.

- Choose toys that can be used in a variety of ways. Blocks, nesting blocks or cups, and toys for sand and water play are open-ended so your child can use them in many ways. These toys will spark her imagination and help her develop problem-solving skills.



- Select toys that will grow with your child. Dolls, toddler-sized dollhouses and stuffed animals, plastic or wooden toy animals, people and action figures, as well as toy trucks, cars, trains, airplanes can be used for years. These toys are great for play at several different developmental stages.

toys for toddlers...

- Find toys your child can use to explore and solve problems. Puzzles, blocks, shape-sorters, nesting blocks or cups support your toddler's problem-solving and logical-thinking skills. Art supplies such as clay, washable paint and crayons offer opportunities for your toddler to begin to express herself creatively. These toys also help your child develop hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills and help her begin to understand spatial relationships.
- Look for toys that will spark her imagination or toys that look like "real adult things." Toddlers want to do the things that you do. Your child often imitates your actions and words. Toys that look like "real objects" such as toy phones, keys, dress-up clothes, dishes and food, and child-sized mops, brooms, toy tools and toy musical instruments make her feel that she can do the things she sees family members doing. She uses these toys to practice being an adult or older child.
- Buy toys that encourage active play. Toddlers grow rapidly and need lots of exercise to develop their muscles. Your toddler will enjoy playing with balls of all sizes, a toddler-sized basketball hoop, tricycles or other toddler riding toys, a wagon and toy gardening toys.
- Include toys that help your child "get ready for school." Books, magnetic letters and numbers, art supplies, wooden puzzles and large floor puzzles, toddler board games.



One of the most important things to remember is that safe household items often make the best toys. Empty boxes, plastic bowls, small pots and pans, old cell phones and old "dress-up" clothing can keep a toddler playing for long periods of time. Piling up old pillows on the floor for her to climb over or make into a cave or fort may be more fun than a plastic fort or house. So, you may want to visit a discount or thrift store and purchase some of these low-cost items as gifts for your toddler.



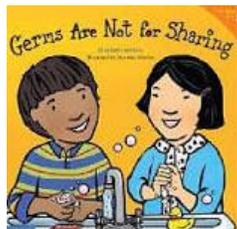
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Hygiene happiness

Teaching your child to use good hygiene habits can be a challenge. The sooner you teach your child how to wash his hands, brush his teeth, and take a bath, the easier it will be to make good hygiene a habit.



[National Handwashing Awareness Week](#) is Dec. 3–9, 2017, and it is a good time to talk with your child about the importance of washing his hands. Focus on preventing colds and flu when discussing the need to wash his hands. Several videos you can watch with your child explain how handwashing kills germs and bacteria. A video from PBS, [Germs! With Sid the Science Kid](#), focuses on why it is important to wash your hands. Tell your child that washing his hands is the best way to [keep germs from spreading](#) and help him stay healthy.



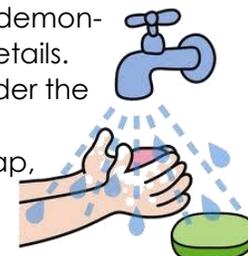
Read him **Germs Are Not for Sharing** by Elizabeth Verdick and teach him the "5 Steps to Wash Hands."

1. Wet hands.
2. Apply soap.

3. Rub hands together for 20 seconds.
4. Use a towel to dry hands.
5. Use the towel to turn off the water.

Make sure your child can reach the sink and can turn the faucet on and off. You may need a small step stool for him to use to be able to reach the faucet.

While teaching him the five steps, demonstrate each one and discuss the details. Show him how to put his hands under the water without touching the spout.



Whether you have liquid or bar soap, teach him how to use each type and how much soap he needs. Teach him a [song to sing](#) that takes 20 seconds so he will know how long to lather and rub his hands together. Show him how to scrub his fingertips and between his fingers and how to rinse off the soap. Demonstrate how to use a towel to turn off the faucet. Take pictures of your child as he does each step and post the pictures in the bathroom to remind him of the 5 Steps.

The [American Cleaning Institute](#) has [posters and coloring sheets](#) you can download and use with your child.



Coming in January

- Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!
- Children's Week, 2018
- Martin Luther King Day
- Help for Hurting Behaviors



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