



Parents' Pages

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Playing and Learning: The Importance of Developmentally Appropriate Toys

During this holiday season, parents, grandparents and caregivers are looking for the perfect toys for gifts. Buying safe and age-appropriate toys is important for children's physical and intellectual growth and helps avoid injuries. The right toys can help children learn and have fun.

Birth to 8 Months

For infants, toys that engage their senses are important. They enjoy colorful objects, soft textures and gentle sounds like rattles and crinkling paper. Babies learn by exploring with their mouths. The following are appropriate for this age range:

- Toys they can hold or reach for, put in their mouths and use to make noise (rattles, teething rings)
- Toys with faces and bright colors (baby-safe mirror, soft blocks)
- Textured balls (big enough for them to hold but not fit all the way in their mouth)
- Board books (books for small children with the pages pasted to heavy cardboard)
- Recordings of familiar songs (ABCs) or lullabies

8 to 18 Months

Infants and toddlers are on the move. They need toys that encourage movement and help develop their fine motor skills. They also start imitating adults, which supports their learning. The following are appropriate for this age range:

- Push and pull toys
- Plastic containers of different sizes (to play with in and out of the bathtub)
- Play phone or play keys
- Toys with buttons, levers, knobs and lids
- Board books they can easily hold

18 to 24 Months

Toddlers enjoy toys that promote independence and creativity. At this age, they are attracted to toys that encourage movement and problem solving and they enjoy simple challenges. The following are appropriate for this age range:

- Ride-on toys
- Simple wooden puzzles with letters and numbers
- Wooden, foam or cardboard stacking blocks
- Non-toxic crayons, washable markers and paints and large sheets of paper
- Bathtub toys

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2 to 3 Years

Children enjoy playing pretend, which boosts imagination and social skills. They also benefit from toys that encourage physical activity. The following are appropriate for this age range:

- Dolls and stuffed animals
- Interactive books (lift and flap books or books with music)
- Toy instruments (or pots and pans with wooden spoons)
- Sand and water play toys (foam letters/numbers for the bathtub)
- Tricycles or other riding toys

3 to 4 Years

Children like toys that support storytelling and creativity. These toys help improve their communication and fine motor skills. The following are appropriate for this age range:

- Pretend play toys (dress up clothes, play kitchen/tool bench)
- Puzzles
- Letter matching or counting games
- Shape sorters and building blocks
- Large and small balls to kick and throw

4 to 5 Years

Toys that promote independence and creativity are favored among this age group. They enjoy games that help them learn to work and share with others. The following are appropriate for this age range:

- Pretend play toys (pretend doctors kit, play chef)
- Simple board games
- Playdough with letter/number cookie cutters
- Picture books with longer stories
- Wagons and wheelbarrows

Encouraging Safe Play

Supervision is key, especially for younger children. Caregivers should regularly check toys for damage and throw away any broken toys or pieces to prevent risks of choking. It is also important to clean toys often to prevent illness. Toys for older kids can be dangerous for younger children. It is essential to follow age guidelines on packaging.

Give the Gift of Prepaid College for a Bright Future

Toys break and kids' interest in them changes, but the gift of college is life-changing. Florida Prepaid College Savings Plans is encouraging families to explore the benefits of 529 Plans, including affordability, flexibility and tax advantages.

As a parent, your to-do list is always long, and especially this time of year. But you can check one of the most important things off your list today and join the more than 1.2 million families who have saved for an affordable higher education with Florida Prepaid.

They offer two plans that work great together to fit your budget and savings goals.

- 529 Prepaid Plans are risk-free. Simply pick a plan and lock in future college costs for less. Plans start at just \$34/month for newborns.
- 529 Savings Plans are the most flexible way to save for college, allowing you to save what you can, when you can.

Both 529 plans are tax-free and can be used nationwide.

And parents aren't the only ones who can save for a child's future. Grandparents and other loved ones can open plans for a child, and multiple families can contribute to the same child's college savings.

[Start building your child's future today.](#)



Coming Up

2025 Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!

The Florida Department of Education's (FDOE) Division of Early Learning (DEL) in collaboration with the FDOE's Just Read, Florida! office are excited about the 17th annual statewide Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! 2025 events scheduled the week of January 27- 31, 2025. Start planning now for this important week. This year, our Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! theme is Building Literacy: Constructing the Foundation for Success.

Mark your calendars for a simultaneous reading activity on Wednesday, January 29, at 10 a.m. (EST). Spread the love of literacy by reading *Little Excavator* by Ana Dewdney to infants and toddlers (birth to 3-year-olds) and *Dig, Dig, Digging* by Margaret Mayo to preschoolers (3- to 5-year-olds).

#DELCelebratesEarlyLiteracy



Family Traditions

Family traditions provide a sense of identity and bond within a family, creating a shared history that is passed down through generations. During the holiday season, share your experiences and memories with your children or create new family traditions. Traditions may be cultural, involving holidays, weekly or monthly traditions.

Everyone in the family can get involved with old or new traditions. Children feel useful and develop a sense of identity when they participate. This shows children that each member is a vital part of the family.

Family traditions do not need to be extravagant, elaborate or expensive. There are simple ways to bring traditions into your family's life. It can be a bedtime story, a weekly game night or eating a meal the family prepares together. The new year will be approaching soon and you could add making a yearly family resolution as a tradition.

Getting the entire family excited and involved creates meaningful memories that children can pass on to their own families.

Voluntary Prekindergarten Opportunities Available

Registration for the 2025-2026 Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) is now open!

VPK is a free educational program that prepares 4-year-olds for success in kindergarten and beyond. Children must reside in Florida and be 4 on or before September 1 of the school year they enroll. Parents whose children are born between February 2 and September 1 of the calendar year may postpone enrollment for the following year when their child is 5.

To register your child for VPK, visit the Division of Early Learning [Family Portal](#).

For more information on the VPK Program, visit the [Division of Early Learning website](#).

New Worlds Reading Initiative

Early childhood is a crucial time for developing reading skills. The New Worlds Reading Initiative offers a free program aimed at enhancing literacy among Florida students from VPK to 5th grade. This initiative provides families the necessary tools to foster reading and growth at home. Throughout the school year, eligible students receive a free book each month, along with resources and activities for caregivers and children to enjoy together. For more information on eligibility and to apply, visit [NewWorldsReading.com](#).

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Family Fun Activities

Puzzles: Give your child a large puzzle board to practice placing the puzzle shape and size in the correct space. Solving puzzles helps with fine motor skills and visual perception as they identify if the puzzle piece fits correctly in the space.

Stringing Large Beads: Place large beads and a string in a container for your child to problem solve how the string goes through the bead. If you observe that your child needs help after a few attempts, model how to insert the string through one large bead. Stringing beads helps with eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills. As a follow-up activity, ask your child to count how many large beads were placed on the string or create a pattern with beads.

 **Manny Diaz, Jr.**
Commissioner of Education

 **Cari Miller**
Chancellor of Early Learning



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Early Learning
LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE.

CONNECT
WITH US!

