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What Is The Real Story Behind Toys And Play?

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A weekly question/answer column

What Is The Real Story Behind Toys And Play?

Tom Lee answers:*

Some of us think play is what you do when you get done with the important stuff. But for children, play is the important stuff. In order to develop their understanding of the world, children need to try things. Children's experiments may not be done in a logical order, but each little discovery is being tucked away to form the basis of their understanding of the world.

- **Dramatic Play Objects** — dolls, stuffed animals, dramatic figures, dress-up clothes. These give children a chance to try new behaviors and use their imaginations. This type of play also helps children understand the world and how we can work together. Children like to imitate adults at work or play.
- **Books and Recordings.** Books build on children's interests, such as animals or silly words. Infants enjoy bright pictures and can soon turn the pages of board books. Stories and poems work well for older children. Children who are read to in their early years usually become better readers.
- **Art Materials** — paints, crayons, pencils, paper, scissors, glue, markers, glitter, etc. Art materials foster creativity and build skills that lead to reading, writing and seeing beauty in life. Infants who can grasp a marker will delight in the motion of scribbling. Preschool children enjoy painting, pasting and cutting. Offer large sheets of blank paper, wide brushes and dress your child in washable clothes. The mess is half the fun!
- **Experimental Materials** — sand, water, clay and musical instruments. These are ideal learning tools because children have so much control over them. They relish their feel and sound. Sand and water never break or wear out, and can bring hours of pleasure as children pour, measure and combine them.

* Tom Lee is Utah State University Extension Family and Human Development Specialist