

# What is an Open-Ended Toy?

January 2010

## DEAR FAMILIES,

For those of us that celebrated holidays last month, January is a welcomed time! We can finally relax a bit after all of the running around to stores, the family get-togethers and other obligations. Once again, we can take the time to reflect and daydream about our children and about the choices we make for them. There was an interesting article in the paper the other day about toys that incorporate technology vs. the good old-fashioned toys of yesterday, and which are better for our children's learning. Here are some reflections we had in the Education Department about this topic.

As technology and the Internet permeate people's lives more and more, it makes sense to introduce children to computers and other inventions they will use as they grow older. A toy is not necessarily bad or useless because it incorporates technology. However, as parents, we should examine the stated purpose of such a toy. We can evaluate how and what it teaches, and determine if our children could receive equal or greater value from a simpler, classic toy.

High-tech toys for little ones are often machines such as single-player computer games or programmed toys with only one or two functions. The benefits of interaction with such a machine versus the benefits of real-life experiences where our children can model, create, explore and develop their own ideas through play can not be compared! Encouraging play with open-ended toys instead of playing with closed-ended toys is always a good idea.

What is an open-ended toy?

- An open-ended toy encourages free play with an *unlimited number of outcomes*. For example, a set of wooden or cardboard blocks can be used to create a variety of different structures.

What is a closed-ended toy?

- A closed-ended toy has a *limited number of outcomes*. An example of this is an electronic toy that lights up when a button is pushed. Not all closed-ended toys are bad. After all, a stacker is a classic closed-ended toy. Even though it can only be put together correctly in one way, your child must develop and use logic and fine motor skills to play with it.

Here are some examples of open-ended toys/games for all ages:

### For Infants:

- You are usually the best toy! Your child will delight in watching your face, listening to your voice and just being around you.
- Looking at a brightly colored mobile or listening to a wind-up musical toy
- Toys with contrasting colors such as red, black and white are most interesting
- Toys with faces or patterns such as curves or checks

### For Toddlers:

- Push-along toys, soft balls, cuddly stuffed animals, board or cloth books
- Toy cars and trucks, blocks
- Buckets and shovels for water or sand play
- Crayons and paper, and Playdough
- Books and hand puppets
- Dress up clothes
- Pots and pans; cupboard or utensil drawers (with sharp objects removed first)

### For Preschoolers:

Play-acting is great fun for this age group. Try offering:

- Toy tool box, or an old one with anything dangerous removed first
- Phones, ironing boards
- Fire-fighter's helmet, various hats, and dress up clothes
- Cardboard box that can be turned into a stove, car or boat
- Stuffed animals, cars, trucks, dolls
- Blocks or Legos

### Outdoor Toys/Equipment:

- Bikes, swings (with an adult nearby)
- Sandboxes with shovels and scoops
- Balls and bats of various sizes, frisbees, hoola hoops
- Chalk and sponges or rags

### For School-Age:

- Board games
- Books
- Drawing and painting supplies

### Outdoor Toys/Equipment:

- Croquet set
- Bikes, jump ropes
- Roller blades and/or skate boards (with helmets and pads)
- Balls and bats of various sizes, frisbees

If you would like more ideas about open-ended toys and fun things to do with your children, there are wonderful resources out there for you. One place to start might be to visit a website that will help spark your imagination like [www.create-kids-crafts.com](http://www.create-kids-crafts.com) or [www.sciencetoymaker.org](http://www.sciencetoymaker.org).

Respectfully,  
The Education Team

## CONNECTING ACTIONS WITH CONSEQUENCES

To help children learn to live as productive members of society, we need to first teach them how to behave properly. For each family, the rules of behavior may differ, but some of the techniques that you can use to help guide your child are the same.

- **Have realistic expectations** – Research has shown that children's brains are different from those of adults. We also know that children do not have the same ability to control their bodies as adults do. Because of this, children behave, well, like children.

As much as possible, avoid situations in which your child has to behave in a way that is not natural. For example, when children are tired, they will throw fits and find it hard to behave. So arrange short shopping trips when your child is not tired.

- **Set your child up for success** – When families have realistic expectations about their child's behavior, they can make plans to help them succeed when a situation is unavoidable.

This might include putting items that you do not want your child to touch out of reach. Holding a child's hand when you are headed into a place where she should not run is another way that a parent can help a child be successful in meeting an expectation. Finally, bringing toys and snacks to occupy a child who has to wait is another way to help set him up for success.

- **Pick your battles** – When a child hears the word "no" too much, it can easily become background noise. Families can make the job of learning rules a lot easier by focusing on certain things at different times. For example, is it important that your child wear a shirt and pants that match? In the grand scheme of things, this issue is probably not worth the battle that might ensue by insisting on a particular outfit.

- **Give choices** – Children are basically powerless in their lives. They are told when and what to eat, where to go, with whom they can play and how they will spend most of their time. All human beings (including children) have a need for power. When you give children choices, you are fulfilling their need for power in a healthy way.

The trick is to give choices from two options that are acceptable to you. Would you like to brush your teeth or put on your PJ's first? Do you want to put your coat on by yourself or would you like me to help? Either way, your child is doing what you would like them to do and they feel like they had some power in the matter.

- **Natural and/or logical consequences** – Because children are just learning rules of behavior, there are times when they will make mistakes. The best "teachers" are natural and/or logical consequences. If your son throws his plate, the food is gone and

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## CHILDTIME'S THE EMPOWERED CHILD™ CURRICULUM PHILOSOPHY

The Empowered Child™ curriculum supports your child by developing the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed to succeed in kindergarten, throughout elementary education and across a lifetime of learning. Childtime teachers plan lessons in many important academic disciplines, including:

### READING & WRITING

Your child learns to love and understand the written word by journal-writing, experiencing wonderful books, storytelling and participating in regular large and small group activities that focus on letter shapes and sounds.

### MATHEMATICS

By counting, patterning, sorting, classifying, estimating and predicting, your child develops foundational math skills and an appreciation for the world of numbers.

### SCIENCE

Performing experiments, investigating properties and observing cause and effect help your child build scientific thinking skills and a connection with the natural world.

Through The Empowered Child curriculum, children feel valued for who they are. Students leave our program well-prepared for their future education, empowered to acquire the skills they will need to become responsible members of their community, creative problem solvers and life-long learners.

If you have questions about the Childtime classroom experience, please speak with your director or contact us at [info@childtime.com](mailto:info@childtime.com).



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If you would like to respond to anything you read, have parenting questions or child development topics that you'd like to see explored in future issues of this monthly newsletter, please email us at [education@childtime.com](mailto:education@childtime.com). We would love to hear from you!



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he may be hungry. If your daughter hits a playmate, that friend may not want to play with her for a time. When a child runs toward the street, he has to go inside or be carried.

Allowing for these sorts of results helps children connect actions with the consequences. However, we must still protect children from consequences that are harmful, such as learning to not touch the stove by getting a painful burn. Those are the times when a parent must intervene and remove a child from the situation.

Along with talking, walking, reading, writing, and a multitude of other skills, learning to live alongside others is an essential task of childhood. These simple ideas can make the learning process much easier on your child ... and you.

## FOCUS ON LEARNING AT CHILDTIME®

At Childtime, you may see children sitting on a rug or at the table playing with marbles, coins or crayons. You think to yourself, "How are they getting ready for Kindergarten if all they do is play?" While it looks like child's play, children are actually busily working as they learn to sort these objects by color, value or size. Children learn to sort when using hands-on materials in a meaningful context.

Our teachers support your child in learning this pre-math skill by putting out different and fun objects for children to organize. When children work with these materials they learn:

- To notice details, similarities and differences in objects
- To form categories, which are essential concepts for reading and math
- Concepts of color, size and shape
- Logical reasoning
- Numerical concepts like more and less

The next time you are in your child's classroom, notice how your child's play introduces them to pre-math skills and logical reasoning experiences. You can see this in the photos of displays, the written descriptions of what children learn during experiences, or by observing a group of children engaged in dividing a pile of marbles into groups of the same color.

## EXTEND THE CHILDTIME EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR HOME

**There are many ways to support your child's development at home. Here are some activities you can do together that will support your child's growth.**

**Infant** – Place a pile of pillows or blankets on the floor. Encourage your child to crawl over or around them.

**Beginning Steps/Exploration Station** – Encourage your child to act out the motions in the following poem, "I know someone very special. Do you know who? I'll turn around and turn. And then I'll point to you." If your child wants to do more actions you could try jumping up and down, clapping your hands, flying like a bird or let your child think of some actions to do.

**Early Learners** – Say the following chant with your child and encourage them to do the actions, "One, two, three, touch your knee. One, two, three, knee, knee, knee." Repeat the chant

changing the body part to touch your arm, your head or think up some other body parts.

**Skill Builders/Kindergarten Connection** – Put a large grocery bag on one side of a room. Encourage your child to scrunch up scrap pieces of paper (or junk mail) into paper balls. Let your child toss the paper balls into the bag. Have your child move farther and farther away from the bag, or hang it from different heights, and then try tossing the paper balls into the bag.

**Discovery Club** – Place some spare change in a pile on the table. Encourage your child to grab a handful of coins and count them. Write the number on a piece of paper. Have them continue scooping and counting the money, and writing the amounts down on the paper. If they are interested, have them add up the total amount of coins scooped. Have them write this number down on the bottom of the paper.

