

Pediatric Toys

“Growing Old is Mandatory. Growing Up is Optional”



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Okay, I admit when I was a child, my favorite toy was an action figure (not to be confused with a doll). It was the GI Joe (Mike Power, Atomic Man), a bionic warrior that was borrowed by Hasbro from the television hit, “The Six Million Dollar Man”. He was half-man and half-robot, complete with a mechanized arm, a mechanized leg, and a flashing atomic eye. Perhaps this was a huge influence and cause of my career now in rehabilitation engineering. Toys, like play itself, serve multiple purposes. They provide entertainment while fulfilling an educational role. Toys enhance cognitive behavior and stimulate creativity. They aid in the development of physical and mental skills which are necessary in later life.



The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates that at least six million children have some form of disability, ranging from learning disorders to severe mental and physical handicaps. The number has increased by about 20 percent in the last decade as survival rates have risen for premature babies and for infants with ailments that were once usually fatal. The market for toys for children with disabilities is as much as \$2 billion a year, according to the Toy Manufacturers of America, and could grow faster than the \$20.7 billion toy market as a whole. In recent years many toys have become more complicated with flashing lights and sounds in an effort to appeal to children raised around television and the internet. According to Mattel’s president “Innovation is key in the toy industry and to succeed one must create a ‘wow’ moment for kids by designing toys that have fun, innovative features and include new technologies and engaging content.”

AblePlay is a toy rating system and website that provides comprehensive information on toys for children with special needs so parents, special educators, therapist and others can make the best choices for the children in their lives with disabilities.

(www.ableplay.org)
Another resource providing links to a number of manufacturers sites and offering guidance on selecting toys is (<http://www.disability-resource.com/toys.html>).



GB Kids is a company that reviews products that do not draw attention to an individual’s disability and are <http://www.gbkids.com/>.

For people trying to adapt child ride on electric power toys for special needs children, this website provides a do-it-yourself toolkit. (http://www.scienceshareware.com/adpated_pedal.htm).

Skills for riding a bike can be difficult as they involve sequences of movements. Therapy to help in this area may use swimming, mazes, obstacle courses, constructional toys and building blocks. Difficulty with using both sides of the body together can occur in some cases of sensory integration dysfunction. A therapist may encourage a child with crawling, hopscotch, skipping, playing musical instruments, playing catch and bouncing balls with both hands to help with bilateral integration.

Hand and eye coordination can be improved with activities such as hitting a ball with a bat, popping bubbles, and throwing and catching balls, beanbags and balloons.

Children with sensory integration dysfunction frequently experience problems with their sense of touch, smell, hearing, taste and/or sight. Along with this will often be difficulties in movement, coordination and sensing where one's body is in a given space. This is a common disorder for individuals with neurological conditions such as an autism spectrum disorder.



Sensory integration therapy with children involves occupational therapy with the child

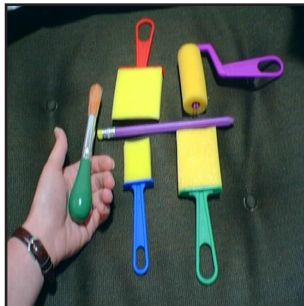
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placed in a room specifically designed to stimulate and challenge all of the senses. During the session, the therapist works closely with the child to encourage movement within the room.



The sense of touch varies widely between children experiencing sensory integration dysfunction. When children enjoy the feel of sticky textures, the therapist may use materials such as glue, play dough, stickers, rubber toys and sticky tape. Other materials that can be useful for tactile sensation include water, rice, beans and sand.

The Vestibular System is located in the inner ear. It responds to movement and gravity and is therefore involved with our sense of balance, coordination and eye movements. Therapy can include hanging upside down, rocking chairs, swings, spinning, rolling, somersaulting, cartwheels and dancing. All these activities involve the head moving in different ways that stimulate the vestibular system.



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