

Smart Toy Shopping

“The true object of all human life is play.”
-G.K. Chesterton

Three Things on Which We Agree

1. Kids are going to play with toys.
2. Parents will be the primary supplier of those toys.
3. The type of toys you supply DOES make a difference.

To talk about toys, we first have to talk about Play.

The Definition of Play

Play is...

Done Without Purpose: No reason other than to have fun.

Done Freely: No one forces you to do something against your will.

Engaging: You have to be an active participant. Play is not a spectator sport.

Fun: No further explanation necessary.

The Value of Play

Play is an important part of child development. Play is where our children learn most of the basic skills that will help them through life.



Through play children learn such skills as:

- **Communication**
- **Cooperation**
- **Following Rules**
- **Developing Strategy**
- **Negotiation**
- **Problem Solving**



Play is their job. Toys are the tools they use to do their job. Anyone who has worked with tools know that the right tools make the job easier.

A Parent's Role in Play

As parents, we have five roles in our child's play.



Observing: Looking for tendencies, preferences, whether the child is a director or participant, is an inside-the-lines/outside-the-lines player, has a long or short attention span.

Following: Joining in at a the child's level and allowing the child to direct the play.

Providing: Giving the child the tools for play (toys).

Safety: Giving proper supervision and providing a comfortable, safe place to play.

Having Fun: Being a child yourself.

Smart Toy Shopping

The True Cost of Toys

Most people look at the price tag and think that is how much the toy costs. But the reality is that the True Cost of a toy is not what you spend, but what you get for what you spend.



In other words, the True Cost of a toy is the **Cost per Hour of Play**. The longer your child plays with the toy, the more affordable it will become. **The most affordable toy is the one your child plays with the longest.**

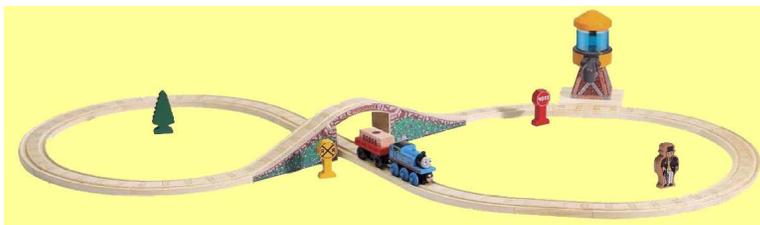
Because kids are going to play, and they are going to play with toys, the more they play with the same toy, the better that investment will be.

Calculating the True Cost

As a formula it is:

Cost of Toy ÷ Hours Played = Cost per Hour of Play

Take, for example, the Thomas the Tank Wooden Railway Figure 8 Set. The set sells for \$40. A typical child will play with this toy for at least forty or more hours before becoming bored. Doing the math we get a True Cost of $\$40 \div 40 \text{ hrs} = \mathbf{\$1/hr \text{ of play}}$.



But what if the toy turns out to be not quite so interesting?

A classic example is Tickle Me Elmo. Most kids thought it was fun to squeeze five or six times before becoming bored. Average playtime? Thirty minutes.



Do the math and $\$25 \div 0.5 \text{ hrs} = \mathbf{\$50/hr \text{ of play}}$.

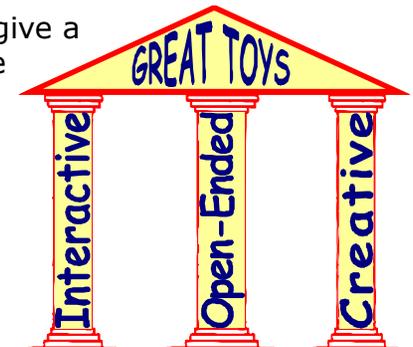
Tickle Me Elmo's up front cost may be \$15 less than the train set, but you can see that Tickle Me Elmo won't occupy your child for very long, so you'll be back at the store to find new toys for the other thirty nine hours and thirty minutes of play that the wooden train set would have occupied, but Elmo didn't. In reality Tickle Me Elmo costs fifty times as much as the wooden train!

Long-Lasting Play Value

The problem is that the boxes don't tell you how long your child will play with each toy. How can you estimate how long a child will play with a toy?

There are three elements that give a toy long-lasting play value. We call those the Pillars of a Great Toy. They are:

- **Interactive**
- **Open-Ended**
- **Creative**



Smart Toy Shopping

Interactive

A toy is considered **Interactive** if it...

Requires Active Participation: The child must do something more than just turn it on. Examples includes non-electric trucks and cars, wooden blocks and action figures.



Requires Physical

Manipulation: The child must continue to physically do something to keep the play going. Examples include puppets, themed playsets and construction toys.

Involves the Child: The child is not "entertained by" the toy, but an active participant in its play. Examples include themed playsets like Playmobil, construction toys like LEGO, arts and crafts kits, etc.

Open-Ended

A toy is **Open-Ended** if it...

Has Many Different Ways to Play: Children have different play modes as they grow. Whereas a tot might like to stack blocks and knock them over, an older child might prefer to create buildings or structures with the same blocks.



Is Not Limiting or Narrow in Scope of Activity:

The wider the types of play, the more children that the toy will engage. Not every child plays the same way. Limiting is excluding. The Great Toys do not exclude.

No Right or Wrong Way to Play: As long as the play is not hurtful to anyone, the Great Toys have no "rules".

Creative

A toy is considered **Creative** if it...

Requires the Child to use Imagination:

The brain is a powerful tool. Our brains are more capable of experiencing an imaginary world than our senses are of experiencing this world. And since children have experienced even less of the real world than we have, their imagination is their ticket to growth and development.



Requires the Child to Create Some Aspect of the Play: The Great Toys expect the child to create some of the play, whether it be rules or parameters, or just the way in which the toy will be played.

Requires the Child to Think: The doll that does the least is the doll loved the most. Why? Because everything that the doll is, her name, her voice, her

Smart Toy Shopping

personality, all came from the child that owned it. That makes the toy personal – it came from the heart, so it will always hold a special place in the heart of that child.

Quality

Yes, quality counts, too. Quality plays a major role in the true cost.

A **Quality** toy is one that is...



Made with Quality Materials:

Not all plastics and woods are the same. The higher quality the raw materials, the longer a toy will last.

Able to Withstand Long Hours of Play: The longer a toy lasts, the longer a child plays with it, the lower the True Cost.

Safe for the Age Group: Children play with toys differently at different ages. Some toys are more suited for the type of play that a certain age group might engage, but won't last under a different age group's type of play.

Picking the Right Great Toy

To get the right Great Toys for your kids you first have to observe your children at play to see how they play. There are three main areas that all parents can observe.



Are they a Director or Participant? Do they like to control the play or just go along with the flow? Children who like to **Direct** do better with Role Play



Toys like action figures, themed playsets, wooden trains, dollhouses and other toys where they are in charge.

Participants do well with Dress-up, Sports, Puppets and other toys where they are one of the characters

Do they Follow Rules or Make their Own?

Children who like to make their own rules do not want the confinement of coloring books, construction sets that just make one toy, or toys with limited options for play. Those toys are better for the **Follow Rules** group.

Make Their Own Rules children do better with blank paper, open-ended toys like blocks, bulk building toys, and less-defined dress-ups.

Short/Long Attention Span? Make sure your toys match your child's ability to sit still and concentrate. Find out average time to build/create/play and match it to your child.

Picking an Appropriate Great Toy



All kids grow at different rates. Here are two more things you should consider.

Smart Toy Shopping

Your Child's Age/Skill Level: Suggested ages help match dexterity, logical thinking, maturity, etc. Do not go outside the lines until you know your child can handle it. Too old of a toy can cause frustration and set back a child's interest in the toy, too young can be insulting or boring.



Lessons You Want to Teach: Every toy teaches both basic skills like communication, cooperation, logical thinking, and hidden lessons like values and morality. Make sure you explore both sides of learning to choose the toys consistent with the values you hope to reinforce.

How Toys Teach

Yes, toys are the great teachers of our youth. There are three ways that toys teach our children.



Direct Skills: Toys teach kids how to communicate, cooperate, problem solve, etc. Construction toys often have mathematical elements. Role play toys encourage communication skills. Toys do not have to be "educational toys" to teach basic educational principles.

Hidden Lessons: Toys also have lessons hidden within the play. For example, most action figures usually have heroes and enemies, thus teaching that to be a hero, you have to defeat an enemy. Some action figures, however, are "everyday heroes" who, instead of defeating an enemy, help someone in trouble. This is an example of differing lessons in morality.

Bratz and Barbie dolls are another example of hidden lessons such as bad attitudes, sexuality and self-awareness. Be careful of the hidden messages implied in some toys.



Value of Quality: The quality of toy you buy teaches your child where you place value. If you buy cheap toys that break, you teach that there is no value in the workmanship. This can be a dangerous lesson when you try to teach your child to do better in school. Why should they do better when you don't value quality work?

Saving Money Buying Toys

Since you are going to buy toys, you might as well know how to get the most bang for your buck.



True Cost: Look for toys that are Interactive, Open-Ended and Creative. They have the longest play value, which lowers your **Cost per Hour of Play.**

Expandable: Look for toys that are expandable, meaning that you can add accessories and new pieces/sets that make the old pieces/sets new again. LEGO is a classic example. With every new set of Lego, you make the entire collection of Lego new again.



Smart Toy Shopping

This is helpful in keeping old toys fresh and keeping kids playing with certain toys for years on end. Wooden Trains, Dolls & Dollhouses, Dress-up Clothes, Playmobil, and most construction toys are expandable.

Best of all, expandable toys give you easy suggestions for aunts & uncles, and grandparents for birthdays and Christmas.



Saving Time Through Toys

Time is Money. Save time with toys and you will save money, too.



The right toys save **YOU** time. Long-lasting play value means less time spent shopping for toys, less time the kids are bugging you because they are bored, have no toys, need new toys, etc.

The right toys save **YOUR CHILD** time. Exercising the brain makes them smarter. A brain once stretched never returns to its original shape. The smarter your child becomes, the more they can accomplish in less time.

The right **TOY STORE** saves you time. A toy store with convenient services like giftwrapping and layaway saves you time. A toy store with a friendly, knowledgeable staff that can steer you to the right Great Toys saves you time. A toy store that understands the importance of safety and comfort so that you and your kids have worry-free shopping saves you time.

Un-Clutter the Toy Box



You already have too many toys. The toy box is overflowing and you have no place to put all the Great Toys you would like to buy.

Here are three tips that will help you clear out the toy box to make room for the right kinds of toys.

Have Your Kids Help You: Get the kids involved by going through every toy in the box to see what they don't want to keep. They may find a toy they have been missing, or help you understand better what types of toys they currently like.

Make Donations of Unused Toys: Goodwill, Homeless Shelters, Abuse Shelters, etc. are all looking for gently used toys. Have your children take the toys they no longer want to one of these services. You will teach your kids the importance of charity.

Give a Toy, Get a Toy: Set a policy that for other than Special Occasions (i.e. Christmas & Birthdays), the child has to give up two toys to get one.

Toys do make a difference. Give your kids the right toys and they will reap the benefits all their lives.

**“Play is the only way the highest intelligence of humankind can unfold.”
-Joseph Chilton**