



*Understanding the Early Years Halifax*  
**HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT TOY LIST**  
for preschoolers

## Toys to Encourage a Child's Physical Health and Well-being

*Including gross and fine motor skills and independence in looking after one's own needs*

**Ride-on toys or toys to push and pull.** "A wagon, for instance, can have huge play potential for a young child," says Margo Kirk, Executive Director of University Children's Centre. "Not only do you get to pull it, you can load it up with just about anything."

**Bean bags.** Pair these with a set of brightly decorated containers (empty coffee cans would do). Young children will love the challenge of tossing the bean bags into different sizes of containers, improving hand-eye coordination and gross/fine motor skills.

**Easels/art sets:** With simple sets of paints, markers and crayons (short, fat crayons are preferable because they help children learn the tripod grasp, experts advise), there is no limit to what your child can create. Custom design your own kit using affordable tins or containers.

**Active toys like hoola hoops, tunnels or a mini trampoline with safety bar:** With toys like these you can make an obstacle course in the rec room that kids will love. Please note, adult supervision is required.

**Traditional baby dolls and accessories** like pretend food, drink and blanket are a great choice for all children and contribute to gross and fine motor skills development and social skills.

**A big piggy bank** and a container filled with brightly coloured bingo chips (exercise caution in terms of size to be sure to avoid choking hazards). Preschoolers will work hard to grasp their "money" and place it into the slot – but they'll love the challenge and quickly strengthen their skills.

**Shape sorters and puzzles** help in the development of fine motor skills. Select a size and level of difficulty appropriate to the age of your child.

**Outdoor play toys** that inspire running, balance, coordination and physical exercise, such as skipping ropes, balls, bikes, sleds, swings and climbing toys.

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*"Too often we give our children answers to remember rather than problems to solve." –ROGER LEWIN*

## Toys to Encourage Social Knowledge and Competence:

*Including skills such as the ability to cooperate, follow rules, play and work with other children*

**Board games** help build a young child's social competence. "Age-appropriate games that allow for short, quick turns are best," says Jenny Gillis, Early Interventionist with Sackville Bedford Early Intervention Society (SBEIS). Gillis recommends simple board games like "Bingo." Other choices include old favourites like "Candyland" and various versions of "Memory."

**Dress-up:** A big mirror and a tickle-trunk full of dress-up clothes inspire dramatic play, which teaches children how to take turns, make decisions collaboratively and cooperate with others. Dress-up doesn't have to cost a lot. Just cover a cardboard box with brightly coloured paper and fill it with eccentric treasures scooped up from local second-hand stores.

**Toy sets** with people (like Play mobile or Lego) or a simple doll house, support imaginative play and encourage children to think about feelings and how others react to things.



## Judging a Toy's Play Value

*"Regarding the 'play value' of a toy, I tell parents to ask themselves what the child can do with the toy versus what the toy can do, especially when looking for long-term play potential vs. short-term novelty."*

*- MARGO KIRK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY CHILDREN'S CENTRE*

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*"A young child is, indeed, a true scientist, just one big question mark. What? Why? How? I never cease to marvel at the recurring miracle of growth, to be fascinated by the mystery and wonder of this brave enthusiasm."*

—VICTORIA WAGNER

## Toys to Nurture a Child's Emotional Health and Maturity

*Including skills such as the ability to deal with feelings, empathy and the ability to reflect before acting*

**"Feelings" Scrapbook or Picture Book** featuring pictures of people displaying different kinds of emotions. Consider taking pictures of people from your own family or friends or cut out pictures from old magazines or books. Your child will enjoy looking at the photos, identifying the emotions and discussing them with you.

**An Empty Photo Album or Scrapbook:** Give your child a photo album or scrapbook at Christmas and spend time with him or her each month keeping it up to date, marking special occasions, everyday family activities, chores, meals, playtimes, etc.

**Collaborative play toys** such as play dough (consider trying the recipe available on the [ueyhalifax.com](http://ueyhalifax.com) website) with a set of funky cookie cutters. Also choose building blocks, baking sets, road sets, etc., which allow small groups of children or siblings to create something cooperatively, an excellent way to get kids working together and considering each other's ideas and feelings.

**Photo magnets:** Make your own fridge magnet collection using adhesive magnets, family pictures and glue on decorations. Discuss with your child people's expressions in the photos and how these relate to emotions and feelings.

**Music CDs and instruments:** With music, children learn to sing along with others, dance, express their emotions and develop self-confidence. "Emotional health and maturity can be very strongly supported by music," says Margo Kirk.

**Puppets and puppet theatre** (it's easy to make your own using a nicely-decorated, oversized cardboard box) are not only fun but provide a great way for children to act out their feelings. When puppet theatre is played with siblings or friends, it promotes cooperative play.

### **A Sense of Wonder**

*"If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."*

—RACHEL CARSON

## Toys to Nurture a Child's Language and Cognitive Development

*Including skills such as reading awareness, numeracy, understanding similarities and differences*

**Wooden blocks** top this list, says Jenny Gillis, because they help children grasp concepts of more/less, big/small, balance, same/different

**A book of rhymes**, purchased (or customized for your child using a scrapbook). "Songs and rhymes support language development to say nothing of vocabulary," says Margo Kirk. "Some songs ask you to do actions or follow directions as well."

**Dominoes:** Children love stacking these in a row and watching them fall. They'll need your help, too, which will provide a wonderful opportunity for parent-child interaction. You can also use the dominoes to allow children to match colours or number of dots.

**Water and sand tables** (you can make your own using a big dish pan or baby bath tub on a low table): These types of toys teach kids about quantity, weight, and lots of other cognitive concepts.

**Containers and dry pasta.** Consider wrapping up a set of various-sized containers and a dish pan full of dry pasta. Your children will love learning about filling, pouring and dumping while grasping concepts like "empty/full." "Using small metal cups and containers adds to children's delight in that they love to hear the clinking noises," says Caroline Gallop, Executive Director of Sackville Bedford Early Intervention Society (SBEIS).

**Bath toys** allow children to learn about spatial concepts and actions like sifting, stacking, scooping, sorting, and sinking/floating.



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## Toys that will Build Communications Skills/General Knowledge

*Including the symbolic use of language, story-telling and knowledge about life and the world around*

**"Books, books, books!"** says Jenny Gillis, when asked how to best nurture communications skills in young children. "I love *Dear Zoo; Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?; Goodnight Gorilla; Love You Forever; The Giving Tree* and *Something from Nothing*," Gillis says.

**A Library Card.** This gift is free and gives your child the gift of reading all year through!

**Reading to Your Child.** There is no greater gift you can give your child than to read to your child at least once a day.

**Story-starter games.** Decorate flash cards with pictures of objects, people or places. As a family, take turns making up stories about the pictures on each card. Children will love the stories you tell, and they'll love making up their own stories, too.

**Important** - Please note: Parents must use their own discretion and caution in judging whether the toys on this list are appropriate and safe for their particular child, carefully considering factors such as the child's age and ability. All toys should be used only with close adult supervision.

**"I Spy":** Play "I Spy" often with your child and make your own "I Spy" book using a scrapbook and images. Each page can feature a collage of pictures and a list of things your child can find in the pictures. In this way you can tailor the book to the needs and interests of your child. Throw in some funny photos of your child and the family and you're sure to add to the fun.

**Gift passes and day trips** to The Discovery Centre, a local museum, or the Wildlife Park will contribute to your child's knowledge about the world and create a love of learning.

**Maps and picture books:** A book of maps, a poster of our province or country taken from space, a globe or a picture book about a place you spend time or visit will teach your child about where he or she lives and inspire him or her to learn more about the world around.

**"Felt board sets or magnetic boards** with shapes and pictures are great for story-telling and imagination as well," says Margo Kirk.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFTS

**No gift is more important to your child's health and well-being than the gifts of your time, love and attention.**



The early years count. Learn more.  
[ueyhalifax.com](http://ueyhalifax.com)

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### Special Thanks

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