

# The Parents' Place



A Quarterly Newsletter  
For the Parents of Seminole County  
Special Edition, December 2008



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Our mission is to promote family involvement by providing information on topics of interest in early childhood education to the parent as the child's first and most important teacher.



## Selecting Toys to Encourage Learning this Holiday Season

During the holiday season, stores are packed with a variety of toys and games, making it difficult for parents to know which types are appropriate matches for their children. By selecting toys that offer a combination of fun and learning, parents can do more than just stimulate a child's enjoyment – they can enhance his reading and math skills while nurturing problem solving and imagination.

Choosing the right toy for your child will give her the opportunity to think, practice a particular skill or learn something new, as well as engage her in hours of play. To strike a balance between learning and fun, parents should look for toys that fit their child's age, skills, abilities, and interests, and give him the opportunity to learn and grow. Take time to understand how the toy works and whether it's suitable for your child. You'll help your child have fun and learn at the same time.

## Toys that Promote Imagination and Creativity

Pretend play with dolls, stuffed animals and action figures can spark a child's imagination. Dress up costumes, doll houses and other pretend props encourage children to tell stories and play make-believe. Young children love to pretend with child-size versions of every day adult objects.

Find activities and toys that are pretend versions of items you use on a regular basis. Children love to do what grownups do. Toys that are smaller versions of kitchen appliances introduce children to basic food preparation skills, such as reading recipes and following cooking directions. Art materials, such as paint sets and craft kits, foster creativity and help improve reading and writing skills.

## Toys that Promote Reasoning Skills

Toys like building blocks, Legos, Lincoln Logs, and Tinkertoys actually help young children acquire the reasoning necessary to learn math skills more readily. Look into games like Connect Four or Yahtzee to teach your child strategy and problem solving skills. Remember, small children are too young to be expected to follow the rules of a game.

Toys that focus on nature, such as animals, plants, or insects, offer great insights into the world of science and help enhance reading comprehension and critical thinking. They also encourage your child to follow the rules and strategy behind experiments (which will follow later).

Video games are often not thought of as appropriate for younger children, but they can help build reasoning skills and logic as children navigate the different levels of each game. Sedentary games, such as those on videos or computers, should be used in moderation with young children. Project-based toys such as model airplanes, cars, ships and rockets, help children build motor skills, follow directions, and encourage ideas about how things work.

*The Early Learning Coalition of Seminole and the Early Childhood Education Department of Seminole Community College wish you and your family a joyous and safe holiday season!*

Sponsored by Seminole Community College and Funded in Part by the State of Florida,  
Agency for Workforce Innovation/ Office of Early Learning

## Toys that Promote Early Literacy

Books help children enhance their vocabulary and appreciate words and literature. See if your child has a favorite author, such as Dr. Seuss or Mercer Meyer, and be sure to bring home a couple of his favorite books. For guidance on age-specific books in your child's favorite subject areas, check out

[www.bookadventure.org](http://www.bookadventure.org), or  
[www.rif.org/parents](http://www.rif.org/parents) (Reading is Fundamental).

Find a special diary or personalized writing tool for your child and she'll have hours of fun "writing" in her special book.

Subscribe to a magazine for your child, such as *Ladybug*, *Ranger Rick*, *Spider*, *Your Big Backyard*, or *Zoobook*, to learn about topics of interest. He will be excited about having his own reading materials that come in the mail addressed to him each month.

Consider choosing books with illustrations, content, drawings, and photos that include depictions of members of diverse cultures in non-stereotyped dress and engaged in authentic activities.

## General Tips to Remember

- Toddlers should have toys with larger pieces to avoid choking hazards.
- Choose toys that are sturdy and versatile.
- Toys should fit the developmental levels of the child.
- Choose toys that are safe and which can be easily supervised.
- Choose toys that are made with natural or easily recyclable materials.