

2017 Sacramento Play Summit
Saturday, September 9th at Tsakopoulos Library Galleria
"Smart Play Promotes Child's Potential and Play Quotient"
with Stevanne Auerbach, Ph.D./Dr. Toy™

Summary of Selected Questions and Answers

As part of my presentation on expanding Play Quotient (PQ) at the 'Play Summit'* I invited participants to submit questions. These are my brief responses to some of those questions. For more details I recommend you refer to my book, **Dr. Toy's Smart Play Smart Toys: How to Select and Use the Best Toys and Games**© (now in 4th edition). The book has been published in thirteen countries so far. The book, a comprehensive guide for parents and teachers about play and toys from baby, toddlers, preschoolers, to older children, includes a chapter on children with special needs. It offers many resources, tips, and suggested types of products. Please also refer to **Dr. Toy's Guide**™ www.drtoy.com for suggested, selected, specific best toys, games and children's products.

"Play is the only way the highest intelligence of humankind can unfold."
Joseph Chilton Pearce

1. How much time should be given to 4- & 5-year-olds to play each day in 3.5-hour long class?

Play should be a natural ongoing experience for three-, four- and five-year-olds each day. Everything that is done from entering the room and engaging in activities should be conducted in a playful manner so that it is not rigid, and there is an easy flow between activities; including toys, art music, indoor and outdoor playtime, eating, and sharing. It is useful to offer suggestions to parents to continue activities at home that are also playful and educational for children. Play is an integral part of the curriculum, and should be for all children engaging in all the senses, and providing varied experience, and reinforcement of skills, learning, and fun.

2. During free choice time in a class, should number of students be limited in certain areas? (E.g., Only 4 students can play with LEGOs at once.)

Being free to choose activities is best way for children to learn and expand their interests. There may be some activities that more children want to do so limiting to a number is probably a good idea because children can only

engage with a limited number of other children at the same time. Rotating these activities is the right way to do it so everyone gets a chance to play with the items they most want to experience. It would be wonderful if children could take home some items to use and return the next day such as LEGOs, and show the rest of the children what they created as a form of "show and tell."

3. What kind of toys support spatial learning?

Spatial awareness and learning occurs naturally in most children from the baby reaching for a toy to a child learning directions, and testing and manipulating objects. Children gain in perception and confidence as they become more aware of their physical abilities following directions and playing games. All children benefit from drawing, playing with puzzles and games like throwing a beanbag into a bucket, or moving through an obstacle course. Music and athletic activities help children develop coordination. Following directions is important. Products like tunnels to crawl through or climbing frames, and making models all help develop spatial acuity. Adding more practice is important for children having difficulty, but all children can benefit from extending these experiences.

4. How do you balance integrating play with young children and prevent interfering with their ideas?

Just as you would not interfere with the child's natural self-expression of art, you want to allow them to play, create and express their own thinking, communications, and interactions. You can facilitate, make suggestions, and add materials that can assist them with their play experiences, and, only if needed, be a mediator if conflicts arise that they can't resolve for themselves.

5. What are good toys for infants?

Infants depend on their first toy—parents. I refer to parents as "Baby's First Big Toy." Certainly rattles are good, and teething combinations help with a fussy baby. Consider a mirror on the crib, a mobile, a soft sponge toy for the bath, and a few plush toys that are washable and ecofriendly as great first choices. Singing to the child, listening to music, talking, and later reading aloud adds extra value to interactions. Look for more suggested tips on infant toys in my book.

6. How can I develop play environments that will engage and entice children of various ages for brief periods of time (15-45 mins.)?

Play areas are very important for discovery, and balance. There is a wide range of activities if you consider art, music, construction, as examples. You can create a variety of art activities, music exploration, building, and books. Each being an important part of the child's experiences. Each area should

have its own materials and supplies, be easily accessible, and clearly thematically focused. Add a comfortable rug or chairs and table. Children should be able to easily move from place to place when they feel complete.

7. What can I do when my child says he is bored with his toys? He is the only child and we play together a lot. He is 6 years old.

A child's attention span may be relatively short and as they figure out how to do something, and then don't want to repeat, or try it again. Some types of toy like construction toys give children the opportunity to change according to their whim and current interest. Perhaps they need to interact with several different types of products at the same time so it's not the same thing. The child benefits from playing with other children if it is possible to set up, or attend a play group.

8. What are ways of using toys in the science area?

There are many excellent STEM products that help children learn more about science. I recommend looking at products from learning resources and educational resources. In the area of discovery, for example, there are an early first microscope by Educational Insights, Geo Safari for preschoolers, and the newest Science Wiz, Cells Under a Microscope (www.sciencewiz.com) that offer a look through and discovery of magnification. Also add magnifying glasses, Solar System mock-ups, puzzles, books, and other various science materials, kits, and play sets. Create a robot with kit from OWI (www.owirobot.com). There are a wide variety of products available for all ages to give children direct experiences with science, math, and technology.

9. Is there an ideal number of toys a child should have?

There is no right number for the quantity of toys. It depends on each child in terms of interests and abilities, but a good balance of toys that provide for active play like balls and creative play like art supplies are important. All materials like books and discovery materials help children to develop. They could be overwhelmed by having too many things so it's beneficial to put things away for a while, and bring them out again. It's good to exchange with other families. Toy rental service such as Green Piñata Toys www.greenpinatatoys.com is a good way to offer variety. Recent interview at <https://greenpinatatoys.com/blog/ask-dr-toy/>

10. What do you think of the "Fidget Spinners"?

Fidget spinners are a current fad and will be of interest for a while, and then probably disappear; but they do have a value to help some children focus. Another similar type of a product that does not spin, but is helpful for

children to relax, reduce stress, and enjoy is a Tangle Toy, easy to twist and turn, in different colors, and sizes. www.tanglecreations.com

11. I'd like some ideas for creative play/toys for her age of six and older. Good board games for ages 6-10 that are engaging, educational, creative.

Creative play involves many activities that involve art music and self-expression there are many excellent products that help children with their self-expression. Board games that allow children to cooperate are a good way to play that was made by Peaceable Kingdom and Family Pastimes are some good suggestions. There are many excellent games available for all ages and excellent for children to play together, and with the whole family. Board games help children gain skills, learn to take turns, develop cooperation, and expand language.

12. What is the best way to play with 7-& 8-year-olds?

Children have different interests as they grow and develop. Seven- and eight-year-olds like playing with their peers, exploring new territories, like spending more time alone, and creating their own interests. This is a time for personal exploration in discovering their own interests and skills such as gymnastics, acrobatics, and bike riding. Toys that fit this age group include art supplies, books, construction toys, electronic games, kites, musical instruments, puzzles, software tools, and transportation toys.

13. Are Barbie's harmful?

Barbie is the most popular doll ever made. She has had many extensions over many years. There are many different aspects of Barbie that are both positive and negative. We want children to have positive feelings, self-esteem, and experience belief and acceptance of themselves. Barbie has adapted with the times, and currently reflects greater diversity than she did years ago.

14. Exploration and extension of open-ended toys in outdoor areas? Limited space: lost balls over the fence all the time. Redirection: throw onto the awning that returns the ball.

This question relates to how to maintain active play within limitations. Certainly, finding helpful ways to play that adapts to and best fits your environment is essential. Use whatever is practical to be as low maintenance and active as possible.

15. What could I do in my class to make lasting moments of memories of our classroom-remember their first love of learning?

Retaining special lasting moments can be shared with children, parents and with the teacher if it is done as a video, photos, or scrapbook. Display art and expressions of writing, reading aloud, and taping to share the memories.

16. Is there ever such a thing as too much play?

Play it is not like ice cream where there *can* be too much. Play is a natural flowing process for all children (and adults); the more we play, the happier we feel, and the more relaxed we are. Adding play and more fun expands joy in life to the fullest. Play is the antidote to being too serious, stressed and unhappy. You can choose to find more fun and playfulness at home, work and in life. Find a toy you always wanted- doll, game, puppet, puzzle, Frisbee, creative kit or art supplies you can enjoy!

17. Should you select toys with certain colors? E.g., should they be red, yellow?

Primary colors are excellent for beginning products, but certainly children have interest beyond yellow and red. Children also like natural materials, wood, and a variety of green, purple, and blue among many other possible choices.

- Create many diverse fun times together and enjoy the full spectrum of play and playthings.
- Visit **Dr. Toy's Guide** www.drtoy.com for the 100 Best toys, games, and children's products for 2017 selected by Stevanne Auerbach, PhD, Dr. Toy.™ For your use is a handy guide for selecting toys. **Let's play!**

Dr. Toy's Tips on Selecting Toys and Other Children's Products©

By

Stevanne Auerbach, PhD/Dr. Toy™

Some basic questions to ask yourself before you purchase a toy or any children's product:

1. Is the toy/product **safe**? Are there any potential hazards? Is the product too small? Any sharp edges or loose ties? Is it non-toxic? Durable? Will it take rough treatment? Can it be easily cleaned? Does it meet Consumer Product Safety Standards? Is there a guarantee?
2. Is the toy/product **fun**? A toy or children's product is supposed to entertain the child. It should amuse, delight, excite, be enjoyable, and provide skill's practice.
3. Is the toy/product **appropriate**? Is the toy/product significant now? Does it fit the child's age, skills and abilities? Will it hold interest? Will child happily use it?
4. Is the toy/product **well-designed**? Is it easy to use? Does it look good? Feel good?
5. Is the toy/product **versatile**? Is there more than one use for it?
6. Is the toy/product **durable**? Will it be something that will last for a long time? Children play hard and subject their toys and products to a lot of wear.
7. Is the toy/product **enticing and engaging** to the child? Does it offer an opportunity for fun, and think? Does it help the child learn? Is the toy or product inviting?

8. Will the toy/product help the child expand **creativity**? With the right products the child can expand imagination in art, crafts, drama, hobbies, language, reading, music, movement, science and technology.
9. Will the toy/product **frustrate or challenge** the child? Does it offer something new to learn, practice, or try? Will the child know how to **use** the product? Or will it be too difficult without adult assistance?
10. Does the toy/product match the **package** and the package match the product? If it does not match ads or packaging it can be disappointing. Is age-grading clear? Is the item in the store like the one shown in print or TV advertisement?
11. Will the toy/product help **nurture** childhood? Does it help the child express emotions, experience concern for others, and practice positive social interaction? Does it provide value to childhood? Or are there any violent, sexist, or other negative aspects to product?
12. What will the toy/product **teach**? Does it help expand positive self-esteem, values, understanding, and cultural awareness? Does it offer practice in skill-building? Eye/hand coordination? Fine and large motor skills? Communication? Does it educate the child about the environment? The community? The world? About history? Science and/or technology? STEM/STEAM? Other skills?
13. Can the product be **cleaned** and **reused**? If it is not washable, can it be cleaned in a practical way?
14. Is the toy/product affordable? Does the **price** match the value received?

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Dr. Toy's RX©: Have Fun! Don't forget to find and enjoy a favorite toy or game, and take more time out for play!

About Dr. Toy

Stevanne Auerbach, Ph.D. (Dr. Toy) is among the leading professionals on play and educational toys. Based on 45 plus years of training and hands-on experience she selects the best developmentally appropriate oriented, skill-building products for her original best product award programs. **Dr. Toy's Guide** (www.drtoy.com) assists parents and teachers to make their toy selections. **Dr. Toy's Smart Play/ Smart Toys: How to Select and Use the Best Toys and Games** (4th edition/Regent Press) is a unique guide to play, child development, and appropriate toys from baby to older children has been published in 13 countries, soon in Japan. Dr. Auerbach has published 16 books, including **The Whole Child** (Putnam/Perigee) **The Toy Chest** (Lyle Stuart) **Toys for a Lifetime** (Rizzoli) **The Alphabet Tree**, a children's book (Windswept House) , novel- **The Contest, My Butterfly Collection** about butterflies, poetry, and hundreds of articles; She was King Features Syndicated Columnist on toys for five years, and toy expert for magazines such as *Parenting*, *Family Circle*, *Creative Child*, and on websites such as Sears Toy Shop, Pearson Education, Club Mom, iparenting, etoys, and many others. She has made many presentations to parents and professionals, interviewed by many journalists and authors in the USA and other countries; and has been interviewed on radio and TV for many years. She lives in Northern California Bay Area, is married, a mother, and playful grandmother.

* <http://www.fairytaletown.org/events/sacramento-play-summit-3/>