



If It Fits

An idea-packed resource for evidence-based fun!

Social **TOYS**: Try These Tools for Togetherness!

Types of toys YOU can use to get children playing together

The everyday experiences children have with toys and play materials can provide many opportunities for interactions with other children, provided certain types of toys are available. Certain kinds of toys increase the likelihood that children will interact with one another in group settings. Promoting peer interactions is simply a matter of making these kinds of toys and play materials readily available and giving children the chance to play with them. Just take a look at the toys and play materials you have at hand, and ask yourself the following questions:

Are there toys available that can be used easily by two or more children?

Blocks, toy cars and trucks, and balls are examples of toys that children easily can use in pairs or small groups. Providing children chances to play with these and other play materials that readily allow more than one child to play brings children together and encourages them to join one another in similar play with the toys.



A handy collection of hats, helmets, and other appealing dress-up accessories prompts hours of creative pretend play among this group of preschool friends.

Can some toys be used in active, energetic play?

Wagons, tricycles, and other riding toys encourage social play among children when they ride together, haul things for one another, help one another push and pull, or negotiate a chance to ride.

Do certain toys involve turn taking among children?

Try providing young children chances to use board games, simple card games, or other table games with rules that require “your turn/my turn” exchanges in order to play with them. These kinds of games encourage social interactions as young players take turns with one another and monitor progress in the game.

Can any of the toys be used to represent other things in pretend play?

Don't forget puppets, dolls, dress-up clothes and other things children might use in pretend play. When these kinds of play materials are available, children have the chance to interact with one another as they pretend real-life situations or imagine fantastic scenes involving two or more characters.

Can toys be used in ways that mirror the everyday use of household objects?

Play materials that are child-sized versions of real-life objects include toy dishes, pots and pans, pretend food, tea sets, kitchen sets, and other housekeeping materials. Provide these kinds of toys to encourage children to interact with one another as they use the toys just as they see real objects used in everyday life.

*Check out the Bright Ideas
on Page Two!*



Bright Ideas

Caregivers, teachers, and parents can promote opportunities for children to interact with one another just by making particular types of toys available and accessible to children in preschools, childcare centers, at home playing with brothers and sisters, visiting with friends, and in other settings where young children are together in groups of two or more. Increase children's opportunities to play together by giving them plenty of chances to play with "social toys." Try these ideas:



Let's Pretend!

Hats, Hats, Hats. Collect different kinds of hats and other headgear, such as chef's hats, firefighter's hats, baseball caps, top hats, head scarves, ear muffs, swim caps, straw hats, sun visors, berets, hats with veils, etc., and hang them on hooks so children can reach them easily.

All Kinds of Clothes. Gather a variety of clothing and accessories children can use for dress-up. Include different kinds of jackets and coats, shoes, handbags, shirts, elastic-waist skirts, and shawls and display them within reach of the children.

Puppets for Everyone. Try using child-size socks to make puppets that just fit a child's hand. Glue, sew, or draw eyes, nose, mouth, hair, or other features, and watch as children have their puppets talk to one another.



Building Everywhere!

It's easy for children to play together when blocks are around! Try these simple ideas:

Blocks Plus. Set out wooden building blocks of different sizes and shapes and place accessories like cars and trucks, doll house furniture, or toy animals nearby.

Box Blocks. Try using various sizes of cardboard boxes as "big" blocks children can use together to build a road, cave, house, bus, or whatever their imaginations can conjure.



What's for Dinner?

Children are likely to join one another for pretend dinners and other social occasions when toy-size dishes, kitchen implements, and other household items are handy.

Outdoor riding toys are a great way to bring young children together. Here, a combination tricycle and trailer sparks interactive fun.



It's Your Turn!

Simple board games and other table games give young children ample opportunity to interact and take turns with one another. Choose commercially available games that are easy to understand and have only a few rules, or make your own:

Photoplay. A simple board game can be made by gluing photographs of children in a pathway of squares drawn on a piece of poster board. Players see who can reach the end of the path first by taking turns selecting small cards with duplicate pictures from a bag and moving their game pieces along the path to the next square with a matching photo.

Pickup Straws. Two or more young children will enjoy playing a homemade variation of traditional pickup sticks. Substitute safe and inexpensive, multicolored, plastic drinking straws for the usual pointed wooden sticks.

I'm Game. Make a life-size board game using masking tape to line off a pathway of squares along the carpet or floor. Children themselves are the game pieces taking turns moving from square to square.



Take a Ride

See what children will decide to carry when you provide them small wagons, garden carts, or wheelbarrows they can pull and push around a room together.

Rolling Along. Let children ride to their hearts' content on tricycles, pedal cars, scooter boards, or other small riding toys. Try adding child-size street signs children can use to direct the flow of traffic. You can make a scooter board big enough for two children to ride together by attaching four sturdy furniture coasters to a smoothly sanded and finished wooden board, about 18 inches wide and 36 inches long.

Early childhood practices recommended in this issue of *If It Fits* are based on research presented in a practice-based synthesis by M. Raab (2003). Relationship between types of toys and young children's social behavior. *Bridges*, 1(5). Read or download the complete synthesis and/or a user-friendly, illustrated, two-page research summary, *Bottomlines*, 1(5), by visiting our web site, www.researchtopractice.info.

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