

Movement & Learning Connection

I love Christmas and I get excited about the gifts for the children. I don't know about you but sometimes selecting toys can get a little overwhelming, I've been an early childhood teacher so I am pretty passionate about toys and the benefits of play, but I also know the benefits for the brain on carefully selected toys. I have created a list of FUN toys that have excellent benefits for development to help you with Christmas. Please try to shop locally.

Gift ideas for children are endless, how do we sort through the aisles of coloured toys looking for what we want? I'm certainly not an expert on every toy in the stores, but I do have some opinions on what makes a good toy. What opportunities can a quality toy provide to your child?

Opportunities to play, play is the 'work' of children, it must be open-ended (different ways to use the same item again and again). It develops curiosity, exploration and experimentation in an open-ended way

Good toys have staying power; they engage. They help build attention spans, not fragment them. A good toy does not offer answers; it stimulates questions and presents problems for solving (no matter the age of the child). They encourage your child to use their imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills. We also want them to stimulate physical development. Don't worry about being gender specific a toy is a toy, children will show you what they like to play with, offer them all types of toys.

Through my work helping children, teenagers and adults who are struggling with academic learning and my involvement with Gymbaroo I know toys can have a huge beneficial impact on later learning, but I'm not talking about 'brain training' or 'early reading/writing' programs, I am talking about toys that stimulate a child to engage in their work – play.

The toys listed below encompass at least one or more of the elements of a quality toy.

Essentials list

Mud kitchen, think mud pies, sensory fun outside in the fresh air. Imaginative play with pots, pans, water and mud! Basic or involved you can make it yourself!



Sand pit- iconic! Make it deep enough to dig, dig, dig!

Swings – multiple more the merrier. Tyre swing, trapeze swing for dangling (helps with finger strength for writing), have them available at home!

Sensory fun! Playdough, clay, fingerpaint, goop...!!

Bikes starting with a kick along bike at 12-18 months, peddle trike, balance bike moving onto a bike without training wheels.

A permanent creative area, pens, pencils, paper, crayons, paint, scissors, glue, stapler etc

Puzzles, board games, construction sets, lego, dress ups, books and wooden blocks.

Non Mobile babies

Baby mirror for the floor to encourage tummy time, babies love looking at themselves.

A copy of the book **Smart Start**, Margaret Sasse, to give heaps of play ideas for brain development to help with later learning, emotional control and coordination, this is for babies up to 5 year olds.

Liquid activity mat to encourage tummy time, can't have too much tummy time, anything to encourage it!

Mobile babies – 12 months old

A tunnel to crawl through, this has endless possibilities indoors and out, encourages further crawling which is a great way to stimulate both sides of the brain, for reading and writing

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Rocker board - It was developed to help children produce a sense of balance, and gain a strong sense of recognition of their body and areas of the body.

This versatile toy can be used as a rocker, seasaw, balance board, a step, a bridge, a shop, a hut, a racetrack & a lounge seat, the possibilities are endless and only limited to your child's imagination.

Musical instruments, Maracas, Gymparoo Ballarat has a set for sale designed for little hands.

2 years

Games, Ele fun Butterfly catching game. So many fun games, they have many benefits including building social skills, concentration and following instructions.

Mud kitchen (see above for description)

Dolls and make-believe home items (again don't worry about the gender of your child)

3 years



Balance bike and Tricycle. Both excellent for balance and co-ordination.

Climbing equipment. Nothing challenges the body and excels physical development like changeable climbing equipment in the home back yard. This is from Ballarat Tarmak Kids, you can also make your own from recyclables or add your own to this set.



Sit N Spin – the Sit N Spin allows kids to get great movement input at their own pace they control how fast or slow the toy spins! Excellent for balance!

Rody Pony– this bouncing, jumping, fun pony helps with balance, coordination, strength and is so much fun!

4 - 5 years +

Water beads these are guaranteed to give you at least 30 minutes to drink your coffee hot! A wonderful sensory activity that will captivate your child! (great stocking stuffer!). Don't forget clay!



Carpenters work bench. You could make your own or buy this one from local maker Tarmak Kids. Use soft wood at first and have a hammer and nails, safety glasses. This is an excellent way to build creative thinking, maths skills, scientific investigation, physical development and coordination, developing language and vocabulary, and much more.

Matador construction set Pop in the pins, hammer, twist, chisel and create a new and exhilarating masterpiece over and over again-with Matador wooden construction kits.



Great ideas for Grandparents and others giving to under 5's, their parents will be thrilled!

Gift memberships to the ballarat toy library,

Gift membership to Mr Kipp & Little Jimmy toy hire.

Gift a term to Ballart Gymparoo

Tarmak kids have a wonderful collection of quality handmade wooden toys and furniture.

Gift a term a term at the arty, Make Art School, for your pre-schooler or school aged artist .

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Yvette works in her business The Movement and Learning Connection helping children, teenagers and adults with academic challenges, emotional control, balance and co-ordination problems. She is passionate about her work and helping people be the best versions of themselves they can be. She opened Gymbaroo Ballarat with her Husband Mat as the early years from birth are essential to a fully functioning brain. She wanted families to know what was essential about early childhood so each tiny baby could reach their individual potential for the development of their emotions and physical milestones and to reach their academic potential.

Make art school - <http://www.makeartschool.com.au/index.php/classes-2/>

Ballarat Gymbaroo - <https://www.gymbarooballarat.com.au/>

Tamak kids www.tarmakkids.com.au

Mr Kipp & Little Jimmy toy hire www.ecotoyhire.com.au/

Ballarat toy library <http://ballarattoylibrary.com.au/>

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