

PRESCHOOL TOYS BUYING GUIDE (Ages 3-6)



Cat Dog

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Preschool & kindergarten toys overview

Toys to learn the alphabet and to read and count

In this preschool toys buying guide, you will find toys and games that teach various skills to children that haven't yet reached school age. There are many toys that are fun and that can teach preschoolers the letters of the alphabet. For example, preschoolers love to play with stamp sets and [alphabet stamps](#) are a great way for them to learn the letters of the alphabet. [Alphabet cards](#) are also another way to learn the alphabet and they are often beautifully illustrated.

Learning how to read and count early on is quite useful. Magnetic letters such as the [Melissa & Doug magnetic letters](#) are a lot of fun. Children love playing with magnetic letters on the fridge or the dishwasher and as they do they learn the letters of the alphabet and how to spell simple words like "cat", "mom" or even their own name.

Toys that help preschoolers develop motor skills and exercise

With [building blocks](#), stacking toys and jigsaw puzzles children develop both motor skills and problem-solving skills. They also develop important social skills as they play with other children. By the way, there are also jigsaw puzzles such as the [Melissa & Doug Jumbo ABC Chunky Puzzle](#) and stacking toys that take the shape of numbers and the letters of the alphabet. Exercise is important as children develop their muscles and enhance their physical coordination skills. That's why we recommend ride on toys such as the [Playskool Step Start Walk 'n Ride](#) and [toy basketball hoops](#) designed for children ages 3-6.

Toys that teach them to tell time and to keep organized

Learning how to tell time and what date it is are also things that children can learn before they reach elementary school age. There are [telling time games](#) that teach children how to tell time and that familiarizes them with numbers. Chore charts such as the [Melissa & Doug Deluxe Magnetic Responsibility Chart](#) and [calendars](#) are also great as children learn to read the date and to become organized.



Telly The Teaching Time Clock

Learn the alphabet, develop early reading and math skills

Alphabet stamps to learn the alphabet

Alphabet stamps are a great way for children to learn the letters of the alphabet. By playing with alphabet stamps, children write and read words and express their creativity. Children usually love using these stamps and by using them often, they learn to recognize each letter of the alphabet, even entire words, and to stamp their name.

Before you know it, children will stamp more than their name but also new words such as "car" or "house" and even entire sentences. For example, they could work on a drawing, draw a house using an art easel and below their drawing stamp the words "my house". They could draw a car and then stamp the words "our car".

You should choose a good alphabet stamp set and we have selected two that we believe are the most reliable, educational and value for money that you can get. The first stamp set is the [Melissa & Doug Deluxe Alphabet Stamp Set](#) (for ages 4 and up). What we like about this set is that it contains letters in both upper and lower case and it even contains punctuation signs. We also like the wooden box provided which is great for storage.



Melissa & Doug Alphabet Stamp Set

The second set that we recommend is the Educational Insights Uppercase Alphabet Stamps (for ages 3 and up). This one only has letters in uppercase and punctuation (be careful there are no numbers provided). However the stamps might be easier to use for younger children thanks to handles that are easy to grasp and stamps that are just the right size for little hands. A plastic box is also provided here to store the stamps.

Alphabet cards

Alphabet cards are a great way for children to learn the letters of the alphabet and how to read. They can be collected and serve as beautiful decoration in a child's bedroom, in a nursery room or in a classroom. Alphabet letter cards usually have the letters in lower and upper case. Often times younger children learn the letters of the alphabet in upper case but then are unable to recognize letters in lower case. That's why these letter cards which have letters in both lower and upper case are quite helpful.

These cards have an image or a cartoon representing the letter (for example, the letter "B" would have the image of a bee). Children love images and having images also helps them memorize each letter. Alphabet letter cards can also be used to decorate the wall. Actually they can be great decoration in a classroom or in a child's bedroom and a great way for children to memorize the letters of the alphabet as they look at the cards on their wall.

We recommend the [Eeboo All Around the Land Wall Cards](#).

These letter cards are beautiful and contain illustrations with a nostalgic style that children love. They can also serve as beautiful decoration in a child's bedroom or playroom. These cards are a great way for children to learn the letters of the alphabet. Unlike other cards which can be quickly destroyed by children, the Eeboo cards are very durable being made of thick quality stock paper. By the way, the cards are 8" by 10". Among all the alphabet cards that you can get in the market, we definitely recommend these ones.

Magnetic letters

Magnetic letters help children become exposed to the letters of the alphabet early on. Preschool children can learn to sort these magnetic letters in alphabetical order and even to spell simple words such as "cat" or "dog". Toddlers and children as young as one year old can also play with magnetic letters by sorting the magnets into piles of colors or into lower case/upper case letters. This teaches them color recognition and they learn to become familiar with letters.

There are many magnetic letters sets available at any toy store. For toddlers we recommend magnetic letters and numbers that are chunky enough to play. They usually are in the upper case form. For older preschool children, there are magnetic letters sets that have both upper and lower case letters. Make sure you pay attention to the recommended age indicated on box. Another benefit of magnetic letters is that they are usually inexpensive. And children can practice spelling new words everyday in the kitchen on the fridge or dishwasher and have fun.



Melissa & Doug Magnetic Letters

We recommend the [Melissa & Doug Magnetic Letters](#) (for ages 3 and above). The letters are made of wood and the front is painted with a smooth, shiny enamel. The letters are large, good for younger children, and contain both upper and lowercase letters. And like many of the Melissa & Doug toys, there are durable which is not often the case with other magnetic letter sets.

We also recommend the **Educational Insights Magnetic Alphabet** and Numbers. They contain uppercase and lowercase

letters and 20 numbers. The set also comes with math symbols that can be used when your child grows older. Educational Insights also has the AlphaMagnets and Math Magnets Combo Set (designed for children 3 years old and above). This set contains uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers and math symbols.

Teaching the alphabet activities

Teaching the alphabet to our children is very important because the ABC's are **the building blocks of language**. For children to become literate, they must not only recognize each letter, but also know their order and the sounds connected with each letter. Once in possession of that knowledge, a child is well on his way to reading and literacy.

It is also important for children to begin learning the alphabet early and especially **before they start school**. We even recommend that children learn the alphabet before preschool age. We provide you with a list of fun alphabet activities ideas that help children reinforce their knowledge of letters and the alphabet.

Activity #1: create an Alphabet Book (Ages 4-5):

This fun activity helps teach the alphabet to your child and increases your child's pre-reading skills. If you are looking to teach the alphabet to your kid this is a great idea and a nice way to spend an afternoon with your child.

Instructions: Get a notebook, glue, and a magazine. On each page of the book write each letter of the alphabet. Then with your kid cut pictures of magazines. Glue each picture in the appropriate page. For instance a picture of a car goes to the page letter "C".

Benefits: Your child can express his creativity. This activity also increases your child's pre-reading skills.

Activity #2: create Letter Cards (ages 4-5):

Letter cards games are fun. This activity gives a head start to your toddler on reading by helping him recognizing the letters of the alphabet.

Instructions: Buy 26 [index cards](#), markers and pencils of different colors. Write one letter of the alphabet on each card. Ask your child to draw objects that start with the same of the alphabet. For instance "C" for "cup". Make sure that he uses different markers and colors. Let her be creative.

Benefits: This activity helps your child learn the alphabet and increases her pre-reading skills. We recommend that you [download our alphabet letters cards](#) printable that your child can use to participate in this activity. Instructions are provided on the first page. All you need is pencils of different colors and a pair of scissors!

Activity #3: play with letter cards (ages 4-5):

With this activity you will teach your child to recognize letters and to learn how to pronounce them. This game is also a way to develop your child's motor skills and problem solving skills!

Instructions: Buy alphabet letters cards, and hide them around the house. Make sure that they are not too difficult to find. Your child will have fun looking for the cards and this will also improve his motor and problem solving skills. When your kid finds a letter have him pronounce the letter loud. Have him find all the letters around the house and give him a reward (a fun educational toy).



***Smethport Pocket Chart Cards
Beginning Sounds***

Buy alphabet letters cards. We recommend the [Smethport Pocket Chart Cards Beginning Sounds](#). The cards contain pictures so they give a visual clue to children, which helps them increase language skills and vocabulary. The cards also make sounds, ideal if you want your child to associate the sound he or she is hearing to the letter on the card.

Make sure they contain one set of lower case letters and one set of upper case letters. Sit on the floor and have your child match each lower case letter with the uppercase one. Benefits: This game helps your child recognize letters and upper and lower case letters. This also develops his motor skills and problem solving.

Alphabet books that we recommend

There are also alphabet books that can teach children the alphabet. For example, the [Big Board Books Colors, ABC, Numbers](#) (ages 3-8) introduces the concepts of letters, numbers and colors to toddlers and helps them build their early vocabulary. An ideal first book for younger children. This book is also a top seller and sold millions of copies worldwide.

We also recommend the [Dr Seuss Alphabet Book!](#) (ages 4-8). Designed especially for younger children, each letter is featured with beautiful illustrations and text: "Lion with a lollipop", "Camel on the ceiling". Younger children can get a lot of letter practice with the repetitive use of each letter and the easy-to-memorize rhythmic rhymes. The Dr Seuss Alphabet Book is a classic and perhaps the best way to introduce a child to the alphabet.

Another great book to learn the alphabet is the [Melissa & Doug Alphabet Puzzle Book](#) (ages 2-5). If you are interested in teaching the alphabet to your child, this is a really fun book. It contains many removable pieces and magnetic pages. Children match the letter of the alphabet with the corresponding picture. Before you know it, your child will be reciting the alphabet! We highly recommend it!

Phonics games to learn the alphabet and new words

With the technology available today, children have access to a wide range of phonics games that can make learning the alphabet and to read fun. LeapFrog has among the most popular phonics games in the market. They have received many awards including the Parents Magazine Best Toys of The Year Award and the National Parenting Publications Gold Award.

These LeapFrog toys can teach toddlers and preschoolers the ABCs and simple phonics. For example, the **LeapFrog Phonics Radio** (for ages 1-4) features many songs that teach children the alphabet and new words both in English and in Spanish.

The phonics radio has buttons that children can press and pages that can be flipped.

The Leapfrog Friends Phonics

Bus contains many educational features placed onto a toy vehicle. The toy is sure to catch the interest of the child and help him or her learn. Another quality of the toy is that the voice is very clear, so that children can clearly understand and use all its functionality.



Leapfrog Friends Phonics Bus

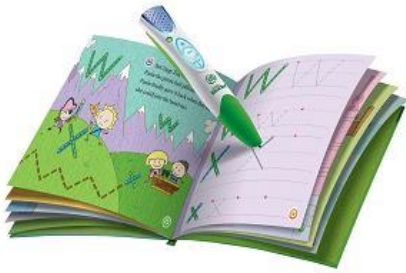
There are other toy companies that provide phonics toys. Fisher Price has a toy called **Kasey the Kinderboot**, a phonics robot (ages 10 and up). The toy is a lot of fun to play with and it can help your child develop academic and social skills necessary for your child's success in school. The toy is so interactive that your kid won't realize that he is learning about reading, math, spelling, problem-solving and even... etiquette!

You can also find interactive electronic pads and **interactive writing tablets** which are very popular and which can help children learn how to read and write. Usually children touch designated spots in the pad and the pad will respond by giving out a sound.

Tag books to develop reading and writing skills

Tag books are a great way to develop reading and writing skills. With these books, children learn their ABCs and how to read words and develop many other skills as these books contain lots of educational games and activities. If you have a child who struggles with his or her reading and writing, a tag book could be the answer. Actually even struggling children as old as 10 have used this book and were able to gain confidence and improve on their reading skills.

How do these books work?



Tag books produce sounds, for example, the sound of a letter or of a word, great for teaching your child the letters of the alphabet and how to read. They also teach children how to write with the tag system (a special pen used with the books). They contain fun and educational interactive activities and games.

Leapfrog Reading And Writing System

LeapFrog actually introduced tag books and has a variety of books for children of all ages from preschool to school age. In order to use them you need to have a LeapReader and [LeapFrog's Tag Reading And Writing System](#).

For kindergarten children, LeapFrog has a tag book called Get Ready for Kindergarten (ages 4-8). This book prepares children to elementary school and teaches them how to read and count. There are many engaging activities and games that are also focused on science and social studies. Again make sure that you have the LeapFrog Tag Reading System and the LeapReader here as you won't be able to fully utilize the book without them.

Fun learning activities with laptop computers for children

Laptop computers for children are fun and they can also be great educational tools. They can help children learn the alphabet, build vocabulary and acquire reading skills. They can also teach children how to count and recognize numbers.

With laptop computers, children participate in many fun learning activities. They also get an instructive introduction to using computers which helps them familiarize themselves with technology early on.

There are also laptop computers for preschool / kindergarten children such as the [LeapFrog My Own Leaptop](#). These laptop are usually more advanced than baby laptops. They open like a laptop, have a keyboard (sometimes even a proper Qwerty keyboard), a mouse. They are both lightweight and durable which means that they can handle being thrown on the floor.



LeapFrog My Own Leaptop

They usually teach children the letters of the alphabet, numbers, how to count, etc. The computer shows a letter and then produces the sound the letter of the alphabet makes. It also make children learn and recite their ABCs.

Learning DVDs for children



Leapfrog Learning DVD Set

Learning DVDs are a great way for preschool children to learn things such as the alphabet, how to count, etc all while watching a fun DVD. The DVDs usually feature fun characters and stories that children enjoy. They are also educational and teach preschool children their ABCs, to recognize numbers and to count and many other skills.

We have selected some DVDs that we believe are among the best that you can get. Some of them have received many awards and are used at schools by teachers. Therefore, if you are looking for DVDs that can help children learn, look no further.

Leapfrog is a well-known educational toys brand and it has a DVD set that we recommend. The [Learning DVD Set](#) (for ages 3-6) is a set that teaches preschoolers how to count, recognize letters and the sounds that they make and how to build sentences with words. The DVD is very entertaining and features frog characters that go through various adventures and experiences that are similar to

what a preschooler would experience. For example: the first day at school, visit at a words' factory, etc.

Another DVD set that we recommend is the [Preschool Prep Series: Sight Words Pack](#) (for ages 3-6). It was won numerous awards (Scholastic Instructor Magazine named it the best DVD for learning sight words) and it is even used in many schools throughout the US. This is an animated educational DVD that teaches children to master sight words (meaning that they can recognize key words without the need to decipher them). The videos are also very entertaining and capture children's attention.

Another learning DVD that we like is **WordWorld: Welcome to WordWorld** (also for ages 3-6). It is another DVD set that won many awards. Word World is set in a beautiful world with lush vegetation, animals, farms, lakes, etc. Children learn to spell the name of animals (dog, frog, bear, pig, duck, sheep, etc). There are many episodes and adventures revolving around funny animal characters and spelling words (and the sounds words make) that preschoolers can thoroughly enjoy.

The DVD sets can be kept forever and can be used by other children as preschoolers reach school age. They can also be enjoyed by parent as the adventures are very entertaining. Overall, a must have in your DVD collection.

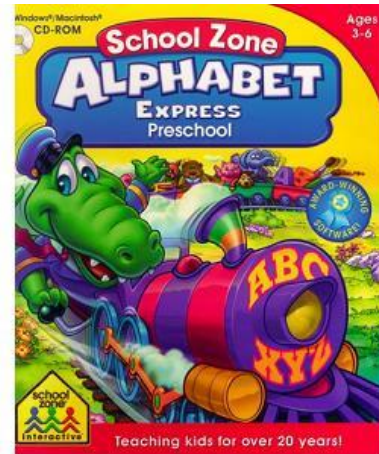
Educational video games for preschool and kindergarten children

There are many educational video games for preschool and kindergarten children that are fun and that can teach children reading, math, counting, logic, time and even languages. By playing with these video games for hours, preschool children learn new skills without realizing it. What's great about these computer games is that children can play all by themselves and learn in the process. Parents should however should limit the time they spend in front of the computer screen for the child's healthy lifestyle.

School Zone Alphabet Express

Preschool (for ages 3-6) is an award-winning video game designed for preschoolers that teaches children the letters of the alphabet through movies and games.

Children get introduced to every sound and letter of the alphabet and learn their ABCs all while having fun.



School Zone Alphabet Express

Reader Rabbit Preschool by the Learning Company (for ages 3-6) is another educational computer game that helps children acquire pre-reading skills and that teaches counting and basic math. The game contains lots of fun interactive games and beautiful graphics that children enjoy.

The **TLC Dr Seuss Preschool Learning System** (for ages 3-6) is another educational computer game that teaches the letters of the alphabet and helps children develop pre-reading skills. This highly interactive and very entertaining video game contains living books that teach children the letters of the alphabet, the sound they make and new vocabulary.

Disney also has a captivating video game for preschoolers called **Winnie the Pooh Preschool** (for ages 3-6). It helps children acquire counting skills, learn letters, number recognition, sequencing and more.

Kindergarten video games are more advanced than preschool video games. They help children acquire early reading skills, math skills and critical thinking.

Reader Rabbit has a video game called **Reader Rabbit Personalized Kindergarten Deluxe** (for ages 4-6) which teaches a full range of skills. The game teaches kindergarten children early reading, basic math, measurement, time concepts and more. This game is actually used in many kindergarten classes which is one reason why we recommend it to parents.

Jumpstart World Kindergarten (for ages 4-6) is a computer game that is certain to enthrall children with its beautiful 3D

graphics. The game contains 30 educational games that can teach children many subjects including reading, math, science and arts. Disney also has a video game for kindergarten children called **Disney Learning Kindergarten Bundle** (ages 4-6). The game involves the Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh characters and is an adventure game which offers many activities and different levels of play. It teaches primary reading skills, including vocabulary, spelling and word building.

Math activities for preschoolers: foster your child's success in mathematics

Preschool math activities involve counting. Counting is one of the **most important skills** children need to become proficient. Statistics show that the earlier children are taught to count, the better prepared they will be when they start school. They also show that children that learn to count early acquire mathematical skills faster.

Early mathematics activities or preschool math activities that involve counting can help the young child build skills that she will use as she begins the school years. Counting can easily be connected to everyday life and be interactive and fun.

Counting games ideas

Learning to count can be a fun and enjoyable experience for your child. In this section, we provide you with creative means and counting games to teach your child to count:

- You could ask your child to count how many cars and houses exist in your neighborhood. You could also ask her to keep track of how many cars are parked on a particular street. And then discuss why some days are busier than others in terms of parking.
- Counting can also be accomplished at the supermarket. For instance, you can ask your child to put 5 items in a bag. This will have her count from one to five.
- There are preschool math activities that can be played in the kitchen. For example, when setting the dinner table, ask her to bring 6 spoons and count how many people will sit at the table. Ask her to count the number of total spoons or cups.
- Another great way to get your child counting is gather all his toys, this can be cars, trains, dolls, stuffed animals, and have him count them. Your child could really have fun counting toys.

For instance, gather all the collection of toys in a big pile. Have your child count how many total toys there are in the pile. Then determine different categories (for example, dolls, cars, etc) and ask him how many cars he has. This will help him build his counting skills while counting toys.

It doesn't seem like much but these preschool math activities can really help your child acquire a solid base in mathematics before he or she begins the school years.

There are many games in the market that you can get that can help your child learn to count. One such game is the award-winning [ThinkFun Zingo](#) 1-2-3 (ages 4-10). With ThinkFun Zingo children count, add numbers, acquire a number sense and recognize the spelling of the numbers. Zingo consists in matching numbered tiles to images on cards. Both parents and children can enjoy this fun matching cards game.



ThinkFun Zingo Game

Develop motor skills and problem-solving skills

Building blocks to develop motor skills and thinking

Building blocks are great educational toys. Building blocks stimulate creativity, develop **thinking**, logic and **mathematical skills**. They are also important for your child's motor skills (hand-eye coordination).

At a younger age, you can buy soft building blocks with no sharp edges that are safe for toddlers. They are usually made of different colors and present different patterns. We recommend the [Verde Foam Building Blocks](#). They include 100 brightly colored geometric blocks. They are made of soft high density foam and they can be used by toddlers to build structures of all shapes and sizes.

As they get to preschool age, you can buy your kid wooden blocks. There are building blocks with numbers and letters that are fun and that really can help your child learn. For example, the [Fisher-Price Builders Stack 'n Learn Alphabet Blocks](#) are building blocks with illustrated objects associated with a letter of the alphabet. Children can build the alphabet, beginner words or just play stack up. There are many other kinds of building blocks that you can get.

Lego building blocks

Lego building blocks were invented in the late 1940s in Denmark but it's only in 1958 that the Lego brick as we know it today was developed. Did you know that the 1958 bricks still interlock with those made in our time? Since 1958, Lego has become very popular around the world and has released thousands of sets tested by both parents and children! The sets are designed to appeal to children. There are many themes including historical themes (vikings, castle, wild west), town and city themes, etc which encourage children's creativity. Lego building blocks also help enhance fine and gross motor skills as younger children put blocks into place.

There are sets for every age. For younger children, Lego building blocks are usually larger in size. For school age children, Lego blocks are smaller in size and can become quite complex and can have thousands of pieces. Some Lego sets go as far as including motors, lights and gears.

Lego building blocks can also help children develop social skills as they play with other children and work on a project.

For toddlers and preschoolers (ages 18 months to 5 years), we recommend the [Lego Duplo](#). This is a simple set and thus an ideal starter set for toddlers. The pieces are large so that they are safe and can be used by smaller hands. There are enough pieces for children to express their creativity.

Sorting and stacking toys and shape sorter toys

Sorting and stacking toys are important for basic hand-eye coordination and for cognitive development in older preschool children. Sorting and stacking toys come in a wealth of varieties including stacking blocks, stacking cups and stacking rings and are more or less educational depending on the age. For younger children (age 3), these toys can teach the concepts of size, height, depth, sequence and colour. Children also improve their fine motor skills.



Melissa & Doug Alphabet Nesting and Stacking Blocks

Later on (ages 4-5) children can practice **numeracy** by counting the parts, adding or taking away parts. There are also stacking toys that can teach your child the alphabet. You can play with these educational learning toys with your child and even make mistakes: your child will enjoy detecting your errors and discussing. Melissa & Doug has great stacking toys. One that we really recommend is the [**Deluxe 10-Piece Alphabet Nesting and Stacking Blocks**](#). This nesting toy blocks can keep your little one playing for hours all while learning to recognize the letters of the alphabet.

Toddlers develop shape recognition and hand-eye coordination with shape sorter toys

Shape sorter toys help toddlers develop shape and color recognition and hand-eye coordination. Shape sorter toys have holes of different shapes and pieces that fit correctly into their respective holes. Toddlers have to categorize these pieces according to their shapes.

What is the educational value of these toys? Shape sorter toys help children recognize the difference between different shapes. They can also enhance their problem-solving skills in sorting out the shapes and looking for the appropriate hole. Toddlers also learn about colors and to name the shapes (oval, triangle, etc). Toddlers

usually find these shape sorter toys very entertaining! We recommend the [Melissa & Doug Shape Sorting Cube](#) (ages 2 and up).

Puzzles for hand-eye coordination and problem-solving skills

Puzzle games can be played by children of all ages. They are puzzles designed just for toddlers and preschool children, usually with large wooden puzzle pieces and a limited number of puzzle pieces.

Puzzle games have many benefits. They can improve basic skills such as hand-eye coordination as younger children manipulate small objects. Puzzles can help children understand colors, shapes, letters and numbers. Children can also acquire spatial skills as they have to visualize a puzzle piece and to mentally rotate it to find the accurate fit.

They also promote the child's brain development. For example, they can increase children's perceptual skills, their ability to process information, analyze and solve problems. As they begin working on puzzles, children see that there is a logic or a set pattern to how pieces should fit together. They become concentrated and focused as they look for the shapes that match together. Puzzle games can also boost the child's self-image as he or she completes the puzzle.

Puzzles can help develop your child's **social skills** too. Usually children play a puzzle game with a group of other children. Even a closed and shy kid will become more socialized as he has to work with other children to solve a complicated puzzle game. If your child does not mingle much with other children, buy a puzzle game and have him play with other children (for instance your friend's or neighbor's kids). Soon you will see your child discuss and strategize with other children about the best way to complete the puzzle.

For toddlers (ages 2 and up), we recommend the animal puzzle [Ravenburger African Animals](#). This puzzle features a serene Serengenti scene of zebras, monkeys, elephants, etc, ideal if you want your little one to learn about animals. It's also made of large pieces and from the highest quality material. For preschool children, we recommend the [Melissa & Doug Jumbo ABC Chunky Puzzle](#) (ages 3-6). A great first puzzle game, it helps toddlers recognize letters and learn about the alphabet. The thick chunky puzzle pieces are also specifically designed for small hands.

Children improve their memory with matching games

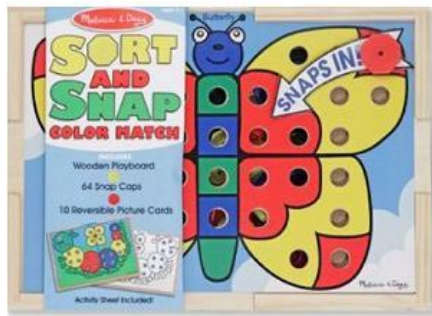
Matching games help children sharpen their mind and **enhance their memory**. By playing these games (also known as memory games) children stimulate their brain. They learn to concentrate and they develop their thinking and problem solving skills. They also learn to **memorize images and words**.

Matching games consist in cards (with images or words or both) that are turned over and that players have to match. If two cards are turned over and they don't match, players turn them down again. If they can associate two cards, they score points. The player with the most matches wins the game. Children have to remember the hidden cards that's why the game enhances memorization skills. They also have to concentrate and think and use their logic to determine each pair.

These games play a little like card games. Parents and children can play together and have a great time. Actually they can also become quite challenging even for adults (some adults don't have a good memory). What is certain is that they are definitely not boring. Don't be surprised if your 4 year old beats you in one of these games.

There are many memory games that you can get. The Dora matching game is one of the most popular but you can also buy memory games with Disney themes (for example: **the Disney Princess Edition Memory Game**).

The Dora matching game is very popular. We recommend the **Dora Explorer Edition Memory Game** (for ages 3-6). It plays like a typical game of matching. Kids flip two cards over and try to match the cards. The player with the most matches wins. Furthermore, the game features popular children's characters such as Dora, Swiper and Boots which children usually love. Overall, the Dora matching game is a must have for preschool children.



Melissa & Doug Color Matching Game

A color matching game follows the same concept but consists mainly in matching colors. The [Melissa and Doug Snort and Snap Color Match](#) for ages 3-6 plays with a board and consists in sorting cards and matching them by color. Children put pegs in holes in order to hold the cards in place. By sorting the cards, children develop some math skills. They can also express their creativity by making pictures and different patterns using the cards on the board.

The game comes with instructions and a list of activities. The board and the cards are very durable and can last for years. Overall, we believe that the game is great value for the money and a great idea for a birthday present.

Animal games

Children love animals and animal games. From teddy bears to favorite cartoon characters, animals play a key role in a child's world. Actually animals can also play a positive role in the child's development, they can help the child acquire knowledge, improve his or her communication and reading skills. They can even help him or her develop mathematical skills. Finally, animals can contribute to the child's physical development.

Your child discovers about animals and their habitat

Children are fascinated by animals. It's not a coincidence that most of Disney's characters are indeed animals. The incredible diversity of the animal kingdom can provoke many questions in a child's mind. For example, how do some animals fly? How fast does a lion run? How does a fish breathe? Who eats who? By learning about animals, your child can acquire a huge amount of knowledge. For example, he or she can learn about an animal's habitat such as the savannah in Africa or the jungle in South America, learn about different places in the world and expand his or her knowledge.

Develop your child's communication skills

Finding out about animals can also help your child develop his or her communication skills. For example, imagine all the kinds of conversations that an afternoon walk at the zoo can trigger. Where does the kangaroo live? In what class does such an animal belong? Is it a mammal, a reptile, etc? We actually encourage you to take your child to the zoo often.

By playing animal card games, you can help your child learn about the letters of the alphabet and even teach him or her how to read. For example, with a card representing a lion, with the word "LION" written below, you can teach your child to read "LION" and to write it. There are many card games with animal characters. For example the [Baby Einstein Animal Discovery Cards](#) are designed for babies and preschoolers. The beautifully illustrated cards help toddlers learn about the animal kingdom and fascinating facts about animals and their habitat.

We also recommend the Animal **Parade Cards by Melissa Sweet**. They are designed for children 3 years and up, they are very popular and have been on the wall of almost every Nursery School for a hundred years.

Other animal games

There are games and toys that involve animals that can also help your child develop his or her motor skills and improve his or her knowledge in different areas (geography, animal classification) and develop pre-reading skills such as animal puzzle games (such as the [Ravenburger African Animals](#)), animal matching games (such as the award-winning Eeboo Pre-school Animal Memory Game), board games with animal themes.

Motor skills activities

In this section we provide fun activities for toddlers ideas involving motor skills. Gross motor and fine motor skills are important for your child's successful progression. But what are motor skills? Gross motor skills involve movements of the large muscles in the body, for example arm and leg muscles. Toddlers usually control and develop these movements faster than fine motor skills. Gross motor skills activities involve running, walking, climbing, crawling, rolling over, etc.

Fine motor skills represent movements of the small muscles in the body, for instance hands. Fine motor skills activities include writing, grasping, pointing and reaching. Fine motor skills are usually the longest to develop for kids. Gross motor development is important because it helps strengthen your child's muscles and because without gross motor skills, your child cannot acquire fine motor skills. That means that it will take longer for him or her to have control over the body and to participate in more sophisticated activities such as painting, writing, putting puzzles together, etc. The lack of motor skills can delay your child's development. There are activities that can help your kid develop fine motor skills. In this section, we provide you with activity ideas that will help your child develop both gross and fine motor skills. Try them, they are a nice way to spend a fun time with your child.

Activity #1: Playing Cook (Ages 2-3)

Here is one of the fun activities for toddlers. Cooking with your toddler is another way to spend a fun time and increase your child's fine motor skills all while working in the kitchen.

Instructions: we recommend that you cook cookies that you and your child can enjoy later. Roll with your child cookie dough on a lightly floured surface. Show your toddler how to use the cookie cutters. Have your kid sprinkle with chocolate and candy decorations. Of course always watch your child to make sure that he doesn't cut or burn himself.

Benefits: develops your toddler's fine motor skills, language skills, mathematics and science skills.

Activity #2: Learn About Animals (Ages 2-3)

Among all the fun activities for toddlers this is one of our favorite! This another fun activity that can teach your child about the world of animals but also help him develop his gross motor skills.

Instructions: get animal cards or pictures. Have your child pick an animal picture. Imitate how the animal moves and what sounds he makes. Be creative! For instance if your toddler picks a snake, start crawling on the floor. If he picks a dog imitate the dog's walk and make barking sounds. If you're not good at imitating you can also buy toys that makes animal sounds. Then have your toddler imitate you. Have your toddler pick another card and repeat the process.

Benefits: develops your toddler's motor skills, enhances his imagination, teaches him about the world of animals.

Activity #3: Play Basketball! (Ages 2-3)

You can play basketball at home with your toddler. This will develop his hand/eye coordination and develop his motor skills. This is one of our favorite fun activities for toddlers.

Instructions: get a medium sized foamball. Get a basket or a cardboard box and put it against the wall. Stand one meter (3 feet away) or closer from the basket and give your child the ball. Tell him to throw it inside the basket.

Benefits: good for your toddler's hand/eye coordination, develops his motor skills.

Activity #4: Treasure Hunt (Ages 2-3)

Here is a fun toddler activity that develops your toddler's thinking and problem solving skills.

Instructions: buy a toy that will make the treasure worth finding and a nice reward for your toddler. Hide the toy in a room preferably in sight but slightly disguised. Important: make sure the toy is not too hard to find. Introduce your child into the room. Direct him by giving him clues such as "you're getting closer or you're getting farther". Hide another toy and continue playing the game.

Benefits: develops your toddler's cognitive, thinking, and problem solving skills. It develops his language skills as you direct him to the toy.

Physical development toys

Riding toys for toddlers

How do you choose the best toddler riding toys? There are so many ride on toys in the market that it can be quite a challenge for parents to choose the right one. Ride on toys help toddlers **exercise and develop** their muscles and improve their **physical coordination** skills.

You should always choose a riding toy that is age and weight appropriate so that it is safe for your child. And you should always check the recommendations made by the manufacturer. Make sure that you consider your child's size, that the toy is easy to maneuver and that it is not too big or too small for your child.

Riding toys for two and under usually sit low to the ground so that toddlers can sit on the toy and have their little legs reach the

ground. Riding toys for older children usually have a higher seat. Get also a ride on toy that will work for your toddler. For example, if your toddler cannot stay balanced chose a tricycle instead of a two wheeled bike. If they don't know how to use pedals yet, chose a toy without pedals.

We do not recommend battery-operated riding toys even though they can be fun. Remember that you want your toddler to exercise and ride the toy by pushing his feet to the floor!

Riding toy #1: Fisher-Price Ready Steady Ride-On

We recommend the [**Fisher-Price Ready Steady Ride-On**](#). This toy is great value for money! Toddlers use their legs to move the ride on toy. It has a wide seat for sitting stability and a wide front-wheel so that the riding toy doesn't tip easily.



Fisher-Price Ready Steady Ride-On

Of all the ride on toys, we believe that this one is one of the most stable and most easiest to get on and off and to ride around. This riding toy is ideal if you want your toddler to strengthen his leg muscles and gain the confidence needed to begin walking.

Riding toy #2: Playskool Step Start Walk 'n Ride

Another of the toddler riding toys that we recommend is the [**Playskool Step Start Walk 'n Ride**](#). It includes two toys in one. One walker that helps toddlers to learn to stand and walk. One ride on toy that toddlers can use to ride around the house as they grow older.

The product made by Hasbro is very safe, with a wheel-lock mechanism that only adults can activate, and very sturdy. Younger children usually love this toy and the fact that they can use it in both modes. We believe that this toy is a great investment as it can accomplish two functions.

Riding toy #3: Radio Flyer Classic Tiny Trike

If you are looking for a high quality, beautiful and durable ride on toy, we recommend the [**Radio Flyer Classic Tiny Trike**](#). It is beautifully crafted, made of solid wood, it has chrome handlebars and a ringing bell. It is also safe and stable: the extra wide front

wheelbase and four wheels provides maximum balance. It is lightweight.

And unlike other ride on toys, it turns with ease and rolls well over a variety of surfaces even over area rugs. A great choice if you are looking for toddler riding toys.

Basketball toys help exercise and develop fine motor skills



Adjust N' Jam basketball hoop toy

Basketball toys are fun. Children love shooting baskets and playing with the ball. These toys can also help children ages 3 to 7 years old exercise, acquire a good sense of balance and develop their fine motor skills.

Playing with basketball hoop toys helps children develop fine motor skills because children have to have good hand-eye coordination and they have to throw the ball with precision.

Closer to the age of 6, children can play with other children and learn how to catch and pass the ball, dribble and pivot.

The basketball hoop toys usually come with a toy basketball. We recommend the [Adjust N'Jam](#) basketball hoop toy. The toy basketball is smaller so that it can fit in the child's hands. It is also made of materials that are safe and that do not hurt children. Basketball hoop toys are usually adjustable. The hoop can be lowered or raised which means that it can be adjusted to your child's height as he or she grows. Actually these toy hoops can be kept until the child reaches the age of 7.

Then it is more appropriate to get a proper portable basketball hoop and a bigger ball. As you play with the basketball toy, you can just start with passing the ball to your child. After a few passes you can start shooting the basket. As a first step, you can show your little one how to shoot the ball with accuracy. Then have your kid have a try. To make the game more fun, you can even start counting the points. See the excitement and pride in your child's eyes as he or she manages to shoot the ball in the basket.

Children ages 4 to 6 can also practice bouncing the ball and dribbling. Basketball for 4 or 5 year olds is not about learning the rules of the game or playing with other teammates but more about learning the basics of basketball including shooting the hoop toy and learning how to bounce and pass the ball with their little hands.

Learning to tell time and to keep organized

Telling time games

Time games are great because they can help children learn to tell time and gain many other skills. Learning to tell time is important because it helps children organize their daily life and follow school schedules. Without the knowledge of time, children can't get organized and organization is a key skill that can help children succeed in school.

Skills acquired by playing telling time games

Time games also have other benefits. Time can help children understand basic mathematics. By learning to tell time and by playing telling time games, children recognize numbers, count up to 60, learn to count by fives or by ones. You can play time games with your child in everyday life. For example, if you go to the post office with your child, look at the clock before leaving the house and look at it while arriving at the post office. If you are baking cookies, set a timer and have your child look at the clock as ten minutes pass. You can also point to the clock often throughout the day and let your child know what time it is.

A list of time games

Don't hesitate to get your kid a watch or a kid's clock. Children usually love clocks and the sound that they make. For younger children, you can start with a children's digital clock. For kindergarten age children, you can use a face clock. We recommend [Telly The Teaching Time Clock](#) (ages 3 and up). What's great about this clock is that it teaches your child to tell time with both a traditional clock and a digital clock.



Telly The Teaching Time Clock

A great toy for younger children is the Melissa & Doug [Shape Sorting Clock](#) (ages 3 and up). This toy combines shape sorting and learning to tell time. Children place the numbered shape pieces in their proper places on the face of the clock and move the hour and minute hands and learn to tell time. The toy is made of wood so it's very durable and can be passed on to another child. Overall a terrific toy for teaching time.

There are also many fun card games that can teach kids time. For instance the **What Time is it? Time Telling Game** by eeBoo (ages 4 and up) is a fun way for children to learn how to tell time. In this card game, players move the arms on their clock faces (the game includes four clocks) to show the time described on the cards. Children gain points for setting clocks to the correct time. Children play this card game in a group or on their own.

There are also books that you can get that can teach your child to tell time. One book that we love is the **Telling Time from Breakfast to Bedtime** (ages 3 and up). In this book, children spend the day with a lovable bunny family from 8 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock at night. Every hour, bunnies are busy doing a new activity (eating, napping, playing etc). The illustrations are beautiful. A great book to teach children about time and the concept of time.

Another beautiful book is **Telling Time with Big Mama Cat** (ages 4 and up). In this book a cat recounts a schedule of napping, stretching, washing the dishes and waiting for a snack. The book also contains a foldout clock with movable plastic hands which allows children to match the hands of the clock with the time being described by Big Mama Cat.

Chore charts get children organized and develop positive habits

Chore charts are a great way to get children organized and have them develop positive habits. They can be used by children as young as three and can be expanded as children grow up to reach their early teens. With chore charts, children help with chores in the house and see their achievements on sticker charts.

Chores that children can do include help make the bed, clean up the bedroom (for example: pick up toys), take the laundry to the laundry room, dust, help in cooking or set the table. For younger children (before school age), chores should be simple (for example: get dressed, brush teeth, pick up toys). For school aged children, chores can be expanded and become more complicated (for example: mop the floor, fold laundry, help in the kitchen, clean windows).

Chore charts help children and parents keep track of completed responsibilities. They can also be tied to rewards. By the way, rewards do not have to be large to motivate children. They can just be stickers, a small allowance or various privileges. Even small rewards can really motivate kids and push them to do more.



Melissa & Doug Magnetic Responsibility Chart

You will be surprised what responsibility charts can achieve. For example, if you have a child who is unwilling to pick up his or her toys, you will be amazed how responsibility charts and this wonderful product can motivate your child to do that and more.

There are many responsibility charts that you can get in the market. We recommend the [Melissa & Doug magnetic responsibility chart](#) which includes a dry erase board and 90 magnets with behaviors and rewards.

Calendars for children

A calendar is great to have at home. Having a calendar helps preschool children learn the days of the week, the months of the year and how to read a calendar. Learning to determine today's date also helps children become more organized. By the way, we also recommend that you take a look at our **time telling toys** and **chore charts** that help children become more organized.

Calendars have other benefits. They can also help preschoolers acquire pre-reading skills and to recognize numbers (and learn their order) by reading the dates, days and months. A calendar usually works with magnets meaning that children can change the date every morning when they wake up and set the day, date, month and year. Some calendars also indicate the season and the weather (for example: foggy, cloudy, sunny). For example, children can use the calendar to switch the date to "23rd February 2012, Cloudy, Winter". Children's calendars can also brighten your little one's bedroom.

This thinking process (doing chores, see rewards or "work before play") will help them throughout their lives. With responsibility charts, children can develop a good work ethic, become organized, keep positive habits and gain the motivation needed to achieve various tasks. Children usually love going back to the chart every day, and track what they have achieved and earned.

Magnetic My First Learning

Calendar (ages 3 and up) is a calendar that children love playing with. This magnetic calendar works with magnetic squares used for the days, months, dates and even for the seasons and the weather. For example, it could indicate today's date as: "14 February 2012, Sunny, Winter". On the downside, the calendar is not as big as those being used in schools, but it's a small downside considering that it is designed mainly to be used at home.



Magnetic My First Learning Calendar

The other calendar that we like is **Alma's Designs Today Is** (ages 3-5). It has a different colorful design that you might prefer. It teaches not only the dates, days, and months of the year but just like the previous calendar it also shows the weather (6 kinds of weather) and seasons. However, unlike the previous calendar it is not magnetic and uses Velcro. Overall, it is another great way for children to learn to tell the date and acquire counting and pre-reading skills.