



Choosing Holiday Gifts for Children with Special Needs

As we approach the holidays, well-meaning family and friends will likely ask for gift suggestions for your child with special needs. This can be a tough question, but if you don't make a specific request, your child may receive an inappropriate gift. Every year, our family approaches gift giving for our son by asking two essential questions: What are his current interests? How can his interests be met in a meaningful, accessible and age appropriate way?

Tips for Choosing Good Toys

Good toys are fun for everyone. Good toys should meet these criteria: be multi-sensory, are accessible and adjustable to meet the child's abilities and location of play, provide opportunity for success (avoid win-lose), be popular and/or age-appropriate, reflect the child's developmental and chronological age and interests, be safe and cleanable, and probably most importantly – facilitate social engagement with siblings, friends and family.

Help with Purchasing Toys

Several excellent, online resources provide reviews of play products. Experts at the National Lekotek Center evaluate toys and rate them for appropriateness for children with physical, sensory, communicative and/or cognitive disabilities. These ratings are available on the AblePlay web site, where there is a description of the toy as well as a list of the skills the item promotes, benefits and play ideas. Parents can purchase toys directly from the manufacturer or add them to a handy wish list to make it easy for others to purchase the products you recommend for your child.

Another great resource from the National Lekotek Center is the *Toys "R" Us Toy Guide for Differently-Abled Kids*. This free, family-friendly guide features specially selected toys that promote the development of children with physical and cognitive disabilities in the areas of auditory processing, language, visual, fine motor, thinking and social skills. Each toy has one or more symbols that indicate the specific skill so parents can easily identify items best suited for their child's needs. See their guide to *Top Ten Tips for Buying Toys*. This year's guide is available online, and of course, all the toys can be purchased at Toys R Us saving the extra shipping costs..

Social games that work for kids of all ages and abilities are ideal. Many Wii games can be played with one hand or with minimal use of the remote devices. Talking Photo Albums allow your child to view photos, and hear about, their favorite activities, places and people. Does your child need specially modified toys? Adaptive Play, Enabling Devices and Dragonfly Toys are great sources for switch-adapted and universal access toys and games. Happy shopping!

Resources

AblePlay www.ableplay.org

Adaptive Play www.adaptiveplay.org

Adaptive Toys Guide www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/At/Adaptive-toys.html

Dragonfly Toys www.dragonflytoys.com

Enabling Devices www.enablingdevices.com

Infinitec's Section on Play www.infinitec.org/play/shopping/toys.htm

Talking Photo Albums www.givinggreetings.com/taphal.html

Toys R Us Differently-Abled Toy Guide www.toysrus.com/differentlyabled

Wii Games for Special Needs www.bellaonline.com/articles/art63675.asp

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