

Developing Skills Through Toys

June 2007

When choosing toys and games for children with hydrocephalus or spina bifida, it is important to consider not only what will provide enjoyment, but whether the toy will also help all round development.

There are aspects of play with toys or games which can be used positively for specific learning: to develop concentration; to emphasise sequencing (putting events or thought processes in step-by-step logical order); memory training; perception (size and shape); manipulation (the use of hand and fingers) and co-ordination (especially hand/eye co-ordination). Some of these are the specific learning difficulties that have now been highlighted as problems associated with hydrocephalus.

There are many good pre-school toys and games on the market which cover the development of such skills and could help in the early years.

It must be stressed, that to gain the maximum play and learning value from these toys and games, adult supervision and guidance, reinforced by talking to the child about what he/she is doing while playing, will help the child with concentration and meaningful play.

All areas of play and development overlap, especially with a young child, where movement, hearing, seeing and thinking are all closely linked and vitally dependent on each other. Bearing this in mind, although the following toys and games have been grouped for specific learning skills, there will be other benefits:

Mobiles: encourage eye focus and movement, leading to reaching out.

Baby gym: encourages eye focus and reaching out and hand/eye co-ordination, as well as being a reward toy.

Pop-up pets: (progressing to hammer balls) encourage hand/eye co-ordination.

Posting boxes: involve recognition and matching of shapes. Hand and finger control are required to post shapes.

Picture dominoes and lottos: require matching of shapes, hand/finger and direction activity. Help in learning to take 'turns'.

Finger paints and puppets: encourage hand and finger play.

Play Doh, modelling materials: materials to develop the feeling of different textures.

Building and construction kits: excellent for hand and finger training as well as for learning the position of objects in space and turning 2D pictures into 3D objects. These will include: Lego, stickle bricks, Duplo, Popoids, Kinex, Meccano.

NB Toys containing magnets are not recommended for children with programmable (adjustable) shunts.

The next stage may be mosaics, peg boards, picture templates, stencil sets, Etcha sketch, Magna doodle, paint by numbers and board games. These help thought processes, sequencing, logic, memory, pre-reading, writing and number work.

Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus

42 Park Road, Peterborough PE1 2UQ

Registered charity no.249338

To see our full range of information sheets and to find out how to donate to ASBAH please visit www.asbah.org

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Computerised games: eg Game Boy, PlayStation, will help with dexterity and hand/eye co-ordination. It is very easy to leave a child to play with these games but a computer cannot take the place of a parent's involvement and time with Game Boys etc should be limited.

To help the child's gross motor skills encourage hopping, skipping, balancing, bouncing (eg Space Hopper, trampoline), running and jumping.

Children will also enjoy using scooters, ride-on toys and bicycles. The child with hydrocephalus may need stabilisers on his/her bike well after his/her peer group have dispensed with theirs.

Imaginative play should be encouraged, although it does not always come easily to children with hydrocephalus. However, most will enjoy using prams, toy kitchens, toy cars and garages, dolls, etc. It is amazing how easy it is to construct a 'house' or 'tent' using two chairs and a sheet!

Toys do not need to be expensive - explore the charity shops and look in your cupboards - pots and pans, plastic colanders, empty plastic bottles (fill with rice or lentils to make 'music'), wooden spoons, sheets and towels will give hours of play.

Imagination costs nothing!



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Community
Legal Service



Further Information

Action for Leisure is a charity which promotes inclusive access to play and leisure for disabled children and their information service offers play leaflets, as well as information and advice on equipment. You can contact them by phone or email or visit their website:

Action for Leisure,
c/o Warwickshire College,
Moreton Morrell Centre,
Moreton Morrell,
Warks
CV35 9BL

Tel 01926 650195
Fax 01926 650104

www.inclusive.co.uk/support/actleisure.shtml

Early Learning Centres sell many of the types of toys mentioned in this leaflet. You can order a catalogue from them on **08705 352 352** or visit their website at www.elc.co.uk

Link magazine

The essential magazine for people with hydrocephalus and spina bifida.

Link is published quarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn) and is packed with the latest news, events and issues for individuals, carers and people living with hydrocephalus and spina bifida. To subscribe contact **ASBAH's Helpline 0845 450 7755** email: helpline@asbah.org or visit our web site: www.asbah.org and click on the publications page.



Help us

ASBAH relies on people's generosity and support so we can help our clients who depend on us for help and advice - people with hydrocephalus, spina bifida, their families and carers. To donate to **ASBAH** please visit www.asbah.org or call **01733 421327**.