



# What's in Your TOY BOX?

**These** days our children, even the littlest ones, can be drawn into technology at alarming rates. A recent survey revealed that 68 percent of toddler aged children engage in some kind of screen-type media every day. Although it is inevitable that our young children will experience significantly more exposure to technology than we as parents did growing up, there is still a strong case to be made for a well-stocked toy box that doesn't plug into the wall.

We all love technology and most of us probably couldn't imagine a life without our smartphones, tablets

or laptops. However, I also know that most of us find it necessary, every once in a while, to "unplug" and get grounded for a moment. I know I don't speak just for myself when I feel "strung out" on too much screen time and need to unplug to play fetch with my dog, focus on my children, run a few errands or even just go to the bathroom! Imagine if adults like me need a break from technology once in a while, how important it is that our kids have such a break too.

The first ten years of life are the most impressionable and significant with regards to brain

By Carrie Lupoli

development. Our children are born as babies with a brain that has a lot of growing to do. Researchers agree that the input children receive to their brains at an early age sets them up for success later in life. For example, studies have shown that the more words a child hears in the first five years is closely correlated with their level of success as an adult.

If adults with fully developed brains are getting strung out on too much technology, let's think about our children for a minute and the impact too much technology may have on a brain that is not yet fully developed. Instead, our little ones are making connections to life through rapid, fast passed movements on a screen that, in some ways, inhibits their ability to address real life situations first hand.

The power of play and creative thinking opportunities can't be stressed enough for our growing

children. Play based interaction and learning exposes them to so many of the necessary skills needed for long term growth and achievement. Through play, a child can develop the following abilities:

- Motor Skills
- Communication
- Expressive and receptive language
- Social Skills
- Emotional stability
- Empathy
- Love
- Delayed Gratification
- Adaptability
- Behavior Management
- Tactile and Sensory development
- Visual discrimination and abilities
- Abstract thinking
- Symbolism
- Following directions
- Winning vs losing
- Short term and long term memory
- Attention and focus
- Persistence
- Follow through
- Cause and effect
- Thinking ahead
- Independence
- Self Help skills
- Hand-eye coordination
- Cognitive Skills
- Coping skills
- Imagination

What research knows about the benefits of play based learning must be balanced and considered against lack of research on the long term effects of significant amounts of screen time. Although technology will be a part of our children's lives at an early age, let's consider the challenge of making sure we balance this exposure with a good, healthy toy box chalk filled with opportunities to learn through exploration, creativity and play!

What's in your toy box? A well stocked play-based area for your child should include the following:

- Ride on toys
- Sports equipment (balls, trampolines, hoola hoops, etc)
- Art supplies
- Puzzles
- Blocks and building materials
- Figurines for imaginative play (can the characters be at a party or working on a farm?)
- Books, Books and more books!
- Life-like items such as kitchen utensils, food, etc
- Dress up clothes
- Everyday items for creative thinking! Can a blanket be draped over furniture for a fort? Can a large box be made into a spaceship? Provide the materials and see what your child creates!
- Sensory items such as sand, shaving cream, dough, water, finger paints