

Choosing and Adapting Toys



Many off-the-shelf toys work well with children who are disabled, but making small modifications and adaptations can make some more accessible. There are ways to adapt toys by developing new play materials, altering a traditional toy, changing games rules and setting up situations to promote play opportunities. Adaptations do not need to be expensive or high tech in order to work well. There are many simple adaptations that make a world of difference allowing children of all abilities to use them.

Adaptations can:

- Allow for discovery
- Increase a child's opportunity to be successful
- Enable a child to become a full, active participant
- Address the individual needs of the child
- Promote and facilitate enjoyment, personal power and control

Adaptations can enhance the quality of a child's life by developing self-confidence and the need to push his or her limits. With the aid of simple adaptations, play partners can be less directive. By adapting toys, we are not lessening the challenge for the child, but rather allowing the child access to the toy. When adaptations are necessary, first think about the following list and then create the best possible adaptations for the particular child.



Think about

- What is meaningful to him e.g. his level of understanding?
- What has the child shown interest in playing with?
- What skills does he have?
- How is the child able to physically manoeuvre objects?
- What is his or her frustration level?

Stabilize

Steady play material by attaching them to a surface. Cut a carpet tile or door mat to fit a child's tray. Velcroed toys will then stick to it.

- Use a C-clamp to attach a puzzle or playhouse to a table or wheelchair tray.
- Put one side of a Velcro strip on the floor of a playhouse (as a carpet) and the other side on the bottom of plastic people and furniture.
- Screw suction cups onto the bottom of toys.
- Place self-adhesive Velcro on each square of a board game and on the bottom of the play pieces.
- Use anti-skid rug material under toys to prevent sliding.
- Blue-Tack also works well to hold down paper for drawing and painting.

Things to look out for in shop-bought toys:

- Toys that have suction cup bottoms
- Toys that snap or stick together (Lego blocks, bristle blocks)
- Toys that have a wide, short, flat base

Enlarge

Make items bigger so they are easier to see. Make parts of toys bigger so they are easier to grasp and handle.

- Screw dowel rods onto puzzle pieces for a larger handle
- Attach a foam hair curler to handles (crayons, pens and so on)
- If your child still struggles to hold pens or crayons, cut the fingers off an old woollen glove and stick Velcro on the palm and the crayon.
- Make colour copy enlargements of game pieces.



Things to look out for in shop-bought toys:

- Large knobs on puzzles
- Large push activators
- Large handles on craft items (stamps, paint brushes)
- Large, wide keys on keyboards
- Large on/off switches



Remove unnecessary features

Consider the goal and take out unrelated elements:

- For shape recognition activities, have objects that are the same colour
- Introduce one concept at a time (e.g. colours, numbers or shapes)

Remove distractions, simplify backgrounds

- Place a light-coloured toy on a dark cloth or towel and dark-coloured toy on a light coloured towel to highlight the toy and assist the child in focusing.
- Paint a puzzle board a solid colour to highlight the individual puzzle pieces.
- Select a play space that is appropriate (turn the TV and radio off, have good lighting, choose a simple room with little distractions)

Things to look out for in shop-bought toys:

- Simple toys with simple pictures
- Puzzles with busy backgrounds
- Beginner books with only one large object picture on each page



Look out for safety and durability

- Laminate any paper items (game cards, lotto pieces, books)

- Replace nails with screws
- Pad corners
- Make pull cords less than 10 inches long

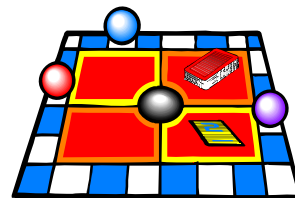
Things to look out for in shop bought toys:

- Thick board books
- Games with plastic playing pieces (rather than cardboard)
- Toys with large plastic playing pieces (rather than cardboard)

Other things to consider

Some children have very little muscle strength and may get tired very quickly

- Toys which give a big reward (light, sound, movement)
- Low effort toys
- Lightweight toys



Switches for battery-operated toys

Switches can be expensive but allow a child to access many things. Electronic stores have a range of off the shelf switches that may be suitable for your child but it is important he is properly assessed. Contact your occupational therapist for advice.

Computers

Getting the right switch access could also help your child to play on a computer. Many software programmes can give a better auditory/visual response from using a switch on a computer than any toy.

Please take care when adapting toys. Adapted toys should only be used with appropriate adult supervision. Information can be found on the Ace Oxford website on its resources page www.ace-centre.org.uk or www.abilitynet.org.uk

Taken from the SCOPE factsheet 'Play Talks - fun ideas to promote communication through play' which can be found at www.scope.org.uk/earlyyears