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Toys for special needs children



By Lauren Beckham Falcone

Tuesday, November 20, 2007 - Updated 895d 1h ago

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Buzz up!

Say goodbye to the stuffed animal.

Plush toys are usually the gift du jour for children with special needs, because many family and friends aren't sure what else to get.

But giving purposeful and fun toys to children with special needs is getting easier. Toys "R" Us, for instance, provides an annual "Toy Guide for Differently Abled Kids," complete with symbols that indicate the skill-building benefits of each toy. The booklet is a collaboration between the retailer and the nonprofit National Lekotek Center, which also provides a list of toys on its Web site, www.ableplay.com. The Toys "R" Us list is available online at www.toysrus.com/differentlyabled.



Smaller toy stores are getting involved, too. Some offer lists of gifts for children with disabilities, while others make sure their staff is knowledgeable about toys that promote learning.

"I think it's important to know what types of things a toy provides to a child - sensory, fine motor, gross motor (skill development) - and we can pass that on to the customer," said Kathy Mabry, owner of Village Toy Shop in Canton and Easton.

Though it's important for children with special needs to get toys they can use, it's equally crucial they have fun playing, Mabry said.

"Our biggest mission is to try to get toys into the hands of kids with special needs that they can play with their friends and family."

Here are a few great toy gifts for the differently abled child:

- **Gross motor muscles** get a workout in the **Jump 'n Slide Bouncer**. \$199.99 at Toys "R" Us stores or www.toysrus.com.
- **Signing Time Videos** encourage communication for all children. From \$19.99 at www.signingtime.com.
- **See Me Sensory Balls** are perfect for tactile stimulation and hand/eye coordination. \$11.99 at Magic Beans in Hingham, Brookline and Wellesley or www.toysrus.com.
- **Alex Toys Tissue Paper Art** promotes sensory, tactile and artistic play. Comes with six self-stick patterns, 500 tissue paper squares in a rainbow of colors and four giant wiggly eyes. \$9.99 at Magic Beans in Hingham, Brookline and Wellesley and www.mbeans.com.
- **My Tabletop Easel** has a chalkboard on one side and wipe-off board on the other, to help kids develop communication, fine motor skills, sequential thinking and spatial relations. \$44.99 at www.simplykidstoys.com.

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