

Tales From The Toy Side

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Play is an integral part of children's development, enabling them to purposefully interact with their environment. Toys are tools for socialization. Because of limited motor ability, many children with disabilities are passive observers and are unable to independently play with toys. Their attempts to play can turn a potentially pleasurable activity into a frustrating experience. But, thanks to modern technology, many toys can be adapted so that children with disabilities can use them.

Most battery toys can be adapted for use with interchangeable switches that can be activated with any part of the body that has purposeful movement. This can be done, in most cases, with a simple to make battery interrupter. Small handles and knobs on toys such as Magna Doodle can be extended with PVC tubes, hollow dowels or rubber tubing (the kind used for making fishing rod handles). Velcro is of course invaluable. Other types of toys that can be easily accessed are those that are sound or motion activated. This type of toy encourages sound production and purposeful movement. However, using a battery interrupter or handle extenders, many of the popular toys found in local toy stores or some that will be available through KidNeeds.com can be adapted and enjoyed by children and their siblings or peers.

Some examples of fun toys are:

Lucky Ducks - This can be adapted with a battery interrupter so that a child can turn the quacking ducks on while his partner picks up ducks. If a child wants to pick up ducks, a small piece of sticky backed Velcro placed on each duck's head and on the child's hand will help with this task.

Elefun - When adapted with a battery interrupter, a touch of the switch has butterflies coming from elephant's trunk (my suggestion is to shorten the elephant's trunk by cutting, and use feathers instead of butterflies).

Magnet Signs - This inexpensive toy needs no adapting. There are several different subjects. I chose "I like to eat." When a child places an apple, ice cream, etc. magnet on the sign, it speaks "I like to eat...apple" ...accompanied by music. Although help may be needed, this toy encourages choice making in a fun way.

Many schools and organizations have established toy lending libraries. Included in these libraries are a variety of toys that have been adapted for use with switches. These libraries may also include developmental and educational toys, environmental control devices, adapted sports equipment, instructional VCR tapes and books appropriate for families (including special books for siblings). Rules for borrowing are made at the discretion of each library. The rules are usually similar

to those in any public library, with a specified number of toys and switches to be borrowed for a designated period of time.

Toys provide children with the opportunity to develop a feeling of self worth that can result from an ability to play actively and enjoy quality leisure time. Toy selection is only limited by our imagination.

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