

Early childhood educator recommends better toys

December 3 2013, by Darrah Tinkler

When it comes to Christmas gifts for young children, Anna Nippert, instructor of early childhood education at Kansas State University's College of Human Ecology, recommends parents be more focused on fostering imagination in their children than simply buying what is on their list.

"Preschoolers are in the midst of developing their [imagination](#). They love experimentation and using their creativity," Nippert said.

She suggests that preschool-age children get toys that they can use in a variety of ways, such as blocks, Legos and materials for creative art.

Toys that have one specific use may not be good choices, Nippert said. If your child already has action heroes or other figurines, look for creative toys that can be used to make houses, buildings, vehicles and schools for those figurines.

Some of the best toys are not really toys at all, Nippert said.

"Old keyboards are a great toy for [young children](#)," she said. "Kids love to pretend to be their parents, so give them that opportunity by setting up a makeshift office with old cellphones, paper and crayons to write with."

Another option is setting up a prop box with dresses and play clothes. But Nippert recommends staying away from clothing that looks like what a child's favorite television character wears. She said to give

children free range with their imagination and let them create new characters and make up their own stories, as opposed to just acting out the last scene of their favorite television show. Other prop box items can include materials to create a construction site, doctor's office, architect's office or a grocery store.

Children a little older than preschool age have the ability to take their creativity one step forward. Nippert encourages parents to find gifts that coincide with what their child enjoys already. For example, if the child already has cars, she suggests parents provide materials the child can use to create a setting for the cars.

"This is a way for parents to encourage their child to view the world around them," Nippert said. "Create stop signs, crosswalks and houses for kids to use with their cars instead of a simple road."

Nippert believes that the latest toys are not that important for children. She says [parents](#) should pay attention to what their [children](#) are interested in and build upon those ideas instead of purchasing the season's hottest toy.

"Eventually you will end up with 50 of the same toy that does the same thing," Nippert said. "Build upon what your child loves and extend their learning."

Provided by Kansas State University

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