A look at robots and other coding toys for the youngest kids

December 16 2015, byBree Fowler

It's no longer tough to find coding toys for young kids. Here's a look at your current options. All of the toys are either sold through major retailers or online.

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DASH AND DOT ($150 for Dash, $50 for Dot, all ages)

Children can use a variety of apps to program Dash, the larger robot, to zip around their living room, perform tricks, or speak pre-recorded phrases. Accessories, sold separately, let kids teach Dash how to catapult balls into the air and play a xylophone. The budget choice, Dot, doesn't move, but still teaches basic programing and lets kids play a variety of games.

Both robots grow with the child. The simplest app lets pre-readers draw a path on a tablet screen for their robot and then drag and drop in picture-based instructions. Older kids can use programming languages.

Online: www.makewonder.com

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OZOBOT ($60 for a single pack, ages 8 and up)

This tiny robot, smaller than a golf ball, lets kids create their own

programs, first by drawing colored lines with markers for it to follow. The robot's sensors scan for changes in color, which it interprets as code. The toy's block-based programming language offers five levels of difficulty. Corresponding [tablet apps](#) help kids along the way.

The toy's relatively low cost has made it popular with schools, while its small size lets kids play with it on a table, or pack it in their suitcase for a weekend away.

Online: www.ozobot.com

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PUZZLETS ($100 for a starter pack, ages 6 and up)

Kids place tiles in a cloud-shaped tray and use them to program the movements of a character through a game. Pictures on the tiles depict various directions, characters and other movements, so reading isn't required. If kids don't get the movements right the first time, they can run the program again, hopefully picking up some problem-solving skills along the way.

Parents can help along the way until they, too, are stumped. Good news: The game will email hints if it notices you're stuck on a level for an extended period of time.

Online: www.digitaldreamlabs.com

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SPRK ($130, ages 8 and up)

You can do a lot with this clear plastic ball. As with Dash and Dot, the

youngest programmers will have fun driving SPRK around and changing the color of its lights. Older kids can use the company's Lightning Lab app and block-based programming language to build and share their programs. The SPRK also works with the slew of apps and games currently available for the original Sphero robotic ball. Most of those apps and games are free.

Though it's now available thorough major retailers, the bulk of SPRK sales have been to schools.

The SPRK has a clear-plastic polycarbonate shell, which lets kids view its inner workings. It is also extremely durable and has yet to break despite continued abuse from two young children.

Online: www.sphero.com/sphero-sprk

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