

Everyday items make the best toddler toys

If you've been anywhere near a toy shop recently you'll know that toys are expensive. Even when our children are babies and toddlers, advertising and competitive parenting can make us feel that we are failures as parents if we can't afford to buy them the latest toy. But the best toys don't have to be the pricey, extravagant ones.

In fact, experts say that the best things for children to play with are often simple, everyday items. Toddlers are full of curiosity, love to explore what's around them and the important thing isn't the latest toy-craze, but something that gives them the opportunity to use their imagination and develop important motor skills.

Here are some suggestions of household items that your toddler can play with – things that will help their development and are just as fun as those expensive toys in the catalogues.

1. Tissue box

Toddlers love 'posting' things into slots. Find an empty tissue box then collect together some different sized container lids and let your little one 'post' them. Of course, once all the lids have been put inside, she can then shake them all out!

2. Old electronic devices

Most toddlers are completely fascinated by buttons they can press so let them play with any old or broken items like phones, remote controls and small keyboards. Pressing the buttons will develop their motor skills and don't be surprised if you see them imitating you speaking on the phone.

3. Indoor den

Make a soft, padded den by draping a throw or sheet between some armchairs to make a roof. Fill the inside with cushions, pillows and blankets for your toddler to climb over, crawl in and out of, and roll around on.

4. Dishes, pots, pans and utensils

This is one for when you are busy cooking in the kitchen. Give your toddler some plastic dishes, empty plastic bottles, and wooden or plastic utensils so that they can pretend to cook up a meal. Matching saucepan lids with their pans and fitting the right lids

on containers can keep them occupied for hours and, if you can stand the noise, there's the old favourite – drumming with a wooden spoon and metal pans.

5. Dustpan and brush

It may not be your idea of entertainment, but for your toddler, sweeping up bits and pieces from the floor with a dustpan and brush is great fun – even when there's nothing to actually sweep up!

6. Old clothes and accessories

Keep a box of old dresses, jackets, shirts, hats, bags, shoes and necklaces for your toddler to dress up in. They love to imitate grown-ups and dressing-up clothes to put on will give their imagination free rein.

7. Empty boxes

Children love empty boxes of all sizes. Never throw out the huge boxes that household appliances come in. Toddlers will climb in and out of them, hide in them and use them as cars, houses, castles, and trains.

Small boxes can double up as dolls' beds, baths or boats. Several smaller boxes of the same size can be used for stacking on top of each other and knocking down. Tape them closed and wrap them in coloured paper.

8. Paper, crayons, scissors, glue and crayons

Two to four-year-olds are just developing their fine motor skills and enjoy colouring and scribbling. Give your child a blank piece of paper and just watch them create. And as long as an adult is supervising and they are using safety scissors, let them cut strips out of newspapers or old magazines. Cutting straight lines is the easiest, and the repetitive movements will strengthen their fingers and hands.



If you are prepared for the possibility of a bit of mess, let your child use glue to stick pictures into a scrapbook or on cardboard. A liquid that makes things stick together is really exciting, and it's great fun to squeeze the bottle and see the glue ooze out.

9. Washing-up

What toddler can resist water to play with? With a step-stool in front of the sink and a few plastic dishes or containers to 'wash' in bubbly water they'll be in heaven.

10. Sock time

When your laundry is dry get your child to 'help' you sort the socks out (sorting and comparing is an important skill for young children). Ask them to find the match for each sock. You may need to help them at first and start with two pairs rather than a dozen. Once the socks have been matched and folded together use them as soft balls for a throwing game. Show your toddler how to throw the 'ball' into a box or laundry basket. Even if they just walk over and drop it in, it's a great activity.

Play with toddlers doesn't require fancy and expensive toys – many of the items we have at home can amuse your tots and help them explore and investigate new things. Why not try out some of our ideas above and think of other everyday items that you can turn into toys for your child.