

## 3 Things to know before shopping for a birthday gift for a child...

I'm Deborah Woods, Kid Counselor. It's my birthday and I'm supporting Sweet Celebrations in providing birthday parties to kids in homeless shelters. I'd love for you to join me in giving! My mommy always said, "It's better to give than to receive." In that spirit, I decided to share some valuable information with you about kids and birthday gifts. In my 15,000 hours of playing with kids, here's what I've discovered about what toys to buy for kids.

### 3. Educational toys are not for kids.

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A birthday seems like the perfect opportunity to sneak in an educational toy. Don't. Kids know you're trying to trick them into learning something. When you gift an educational toy, you're implying that you don't want kids to have fun unless they're learning something in the process. Kids know that adults don't want them wasting their time having fun. Those educational things get tossed aside after the initial novelty wears off. Sometimes the novelty wears off after a couple of hours and sometimes it wears off after the first few minutes. Leave the educational toys on the toy store shelf. Let someone else make this mistake.

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### 2. Leave the movie script (and the branded toys, you know the ones) at the theatre.

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Toy manufacturers know the best way to sell a toy is to make a movie. Once kids get a look at the heroes and villains in your blockbuster selling movie, they beg mom and dad for the full line of toys. They want every action figure, coloring book, all the vehicles and accessories. These toys make you popular with the birthday boy or girl until the next movie comes out and your gift gets tossed aside. Movies and the branded toys that come with them give kids a script, a limited way of playing out a character. The play goes as the adult script writers wrote the movie script. There's little room for imagination. Too many kids feel restricted by the movie's storyline. Be a hero and leave the branded toys where they are. You can do more to help empower the birthday child's imaginative problem solving skills.

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### 1. Imaginative play wins the day!

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Kids learn best through imaginative self-directed play. The best toys allow kids to create their own stories. The simpler the construction, the more imagination the child has to put into the use of the toy. A plain baby doll is a better choice than one that cries and sings and recites poetry in three languages. An unpainted wooden dollhouse with plain wooden furniture allows children to imagine the house differently on different days depending on their mood and preference. High tech toys are used in one specific manner. Low tech toys can be used in many creative ways depending on the child's imagination and choices. Play is the language a child uses to solve problems. Toys are the tools they use. Select a toy that stimulates the imagination. If it stimulates your imagination, buy it. Your gift will end up being the favorite.

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