

NEWSLETTER

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TOY OVERLOAD

Before you head for the mall, let me warn you about a childhood "disease" epidemic currently sweeping the country: TOY OVERLOAD!

Some children have so many toys they don't have room to move around, let alone find the toy they want. And, what's worse, they keep asking for more toys because they can't find anything to play with in the confusion.

This disease can cause high levels of UNHAPPINESS, CRANKINESS, and CONFUSION in its helpless victims.

Children don't have the immune system to ward off toy overload. It's the parents' job to prevent it and/or figure out how to deal with it if others infect your children with this virus by being overly generous.

Play with objects fills an important developmental need, so every child needs some toys. The question is how many and what kind.

Children today feel "entitled" to get whatever they see advertised. Affluent parents may think, "Why not, we can afford it". Struggling parents may feel sorry for their children who don't have year-round advantages so the parents overbuy at Christmas. Working parents may think--consciously or subconsciously--that toys substitute for time. And many parents cave in to the kids' demands just because it's too darn difficult to resist.

I can't fault parents (or grandparents) for wanting to make children happy on birthdays or holidays. But I am absolutely convinced that when it comes to toys, less is more.

As an early holiday present to my readers let me once again offer my suggestions for parents and grandparents this holiday season:

- o DO NOT BUY TOO MANY TOYS! A reasonable goal: one toy from Mom and Dad, one from Grandma and Grandpa, and one from Santa per child.

- o AVOID JUNK TOYS! These are invariably plastic, breakable, un-fixable, anti-imagination (the child can only do one thing with them), and widely-advertised/displayed toys. They often come in a series so

children want the whole set.

- o Buy DEVELOPMENTALLY-APPROPRIATE TOYS.

- o Take into account the child's skills and talents and what he or she likes to do when you shop for toys.

- o Concentrate on "NUTRITIOUS" TOYS. These toys are sturdy, can be used over and over again, and can be used in several different ways depending on where the child's imagination goes that day. Nutritious toys are building sets like Lego; items that foster creativity like crayons, paint sets, and clay; sports equipment; and objects that imitate what adults use like trucks, dolls, and dishes.

- o Give a BOOK on every possible occasion.

- o Remember that children often need parental help with toys. Not only will the older child need help with directions, but the younger child may need a lesson in imagination. The child who seems bored with a dump truck may love your suggestion to build a 2-story garage out of a plastic laundry basket and a cookie sheet ramp.

- o Help your children avoid toy confusion and learn responsibility by teaching them how to put toys away. Start TOY PICKUP at a very early age. Even a crawling baby can help you toss toys in a hamper at the end of the day if you make a game of it. Show preschoolers how to store small pieces in clear plastic boxes or jars. Help them label containers, first with pictures then words. As children get older, teach them how to sort toys and organize them just the way you organize a closet. Make it easy for them by providing suitable, reachable toy containers.

- o SHARE THE JOY! Give your child the opportunity of GIVING this holiday season. Be sure to buy and wrap at least one toy for a child less fortunate than your own--and involve your child in the process. Involve older children in decisions about where the family charity dollar should go this year. And it's certainly appropriate to say, "You got so many presents today, which toy would you like to give away to a child who doesn't have any toys?"

- o On a budget? Be creative and "recycle". Children love to build and dress up. Create a Builder's Kit out of thread spools, paper spools, popsicle sticks, etc. to which you add glue (safe variety), heavy thread, or glitter. Make a Dress-up Treasure Chest out of old clothes, beads, etc. to which you add some kiddie makeup.

o When doting relatives bring too many toys, let the child open all the presents. But avoid toy overload by putting some toys away. Create a TOY BANK that works like a library. The rule is that in order to take a toy out of the bank you must put one back in. You decide for the little ones which toys get banked. At about age three your children can decide. Tell them toys get tired too!