

Favorite Toys

by
Tracy Vail, MS, CCC/SLP

This list includes “first toys” that have been found to be favorites of the children.

Remember that each child is different so choose those that appear to be similar to other things your child/student has found enjoyable or similar to some of the self-stimulating behaviors exhibited by the child.

The initial goal is to determine as many different types of items (stimuli) that can serve as a reinforcer during teaching. By observing and introducing items that appeal to the child’s individual responses to sensations (stimuli) we can build a large number of possible reinforcers.

Please note that it is not recommended that children be left alone to “play” with these toys.

We do not want the child to continue to be “automatically reinforced” by self-stimulating behaviors or toys. Instead, they should be used to engage the child (pair the parent/instructor and sounds/words with reinforcement). With any of these toys or activities, the use of anticipation, animated facial expressions, maintaining control of the parts of the toys, and surprise can be used to insure you are included in the fun! (paired with reinforcement)

Linear movement toys (visual stimulation) - Merely presenting the items to the child may not be effective. Try moving them in from of the child in the way in which he typically moves things in order to gain his attention to the item. Show him the items with a great deal of excitement or drama in your voice or facial expression to let him know how exciting you think it is!

1. Drawing/coloring tools- markers, crayons, pencils
2. Tools for hitting, pounding, catching- wooden spoons, drums sticks, spatulas, bug nets, baseball bat, shovels
3. Things that move, or can be made to move, in a linear fashion- rice/sand/beans poured from a cup, trains, cars, lines drawn by other people, legs on dolls/animals, magic wands, ribbons on a stick, squirt bottles or sports bottles filled with water, hoses
4. Rain sticks or toys that allow fluids to move from one end to the other when tipped over

Spinning Toys (Visual Stimulation) - Some children enjoy items that spin only if there is no sound associated, others like spinning things with lights and still others like things that spin only if music is involved. Try various types of spinning toys to determine the child’s preference. Be sure you’re involved with the play by maintaining control of the parts, staying down at the child’s level as close as he will tolerate and using your body (facial expression, exaggerated movements), anticipation and surprise to be sure you’re included with the fun (paired with reinforcement).

1. Gears/wheels- both motorized and mechanical.
2. Tops- those with lights, sounds as well as quiet tops.
3. Ribbons on sticks, spun in circles



4. "Bee Bop" Flower toy- this toy has 3 circles that spin on which flowers and animals can be stacked. It can be found in the infant section of major toy stores.
5. Flashlights with spinning toys on top or flashing the light of a regular flashlight in circles.
6. Toy "Merry-go-rounds", Ferris Wheels, windmills, cars on roads, trains on tracks.
7. Musical toys with spinning parts
8. Balloons blown up then allowed to "fly away" will often spin around in circles as they deflate.

Movement (Vestibular Stimulation) - Many children enjoy movement and toys that generate or create movement. Just be careful to observe the child carefully to be sure the movement is not over stimulating. According to OT literature, in general, back and forth movement appears less stimulating than side-to-side movement. The most stimulating movement tends to be rotational (spinning) and should be used carefully. Combining a variety of movements is generally more stimulating than one single movement. So, if you want to calm a child, you may want to provide rocking movements whereas if you want to "rev up" the child, you might want to provide more varied or more stimulating movements.

1. People- rocking in a rocking chair or while standing- Some children may be reinforced by movement but may find touch aversive so experiment with different ways of holding the child.
2. Rocking chairs, rocking horses, sitting toys that rock.
3. Swings- standard or "home made" swings. Various materials such as Lycra can provide more pressure and a smaller space to add to the enjoyment of swinging for some children. There are many "therapeutic" swings on the market that can provide different types of movements combined with different types of touch. Experiment to see what the child appears to enjoy.
4. Running- Be sure the child is able to discriminate between the environmental conditions that can make running fun (i.e. playing chase) and dangerous (running into the street). For example, you might want to only play chase in a certain room of the house but not in any others or outside to add many differences between the settings so the child does not tend to run away from you when you are not playing. Teach safety responses such as "stop" or "come here" if you are going to play chase games with the child.
5. "Sit n Spin", Merry-go-rounds, other riding toys that spin- As mentioned above, be sure to monitor over stimulation.
6. Jumping- trampolines, beds, cushions-
7. "Crashing"- Jumping into cushions, being "tossed" on the bed (gently of course)

Touch (tactile stimulation) - Many children appear to enjoy the feel of sticky textures. Others respond well to different types of massage or deep pressure. Most children appear to enjoy deep pressure using the palm of your hand rather than lighter more "staccato" type touch but experiment because all children are unique. Be sure to attend to how the child responds to the tactile stimulation



vs. the smell. Some children may enjoy the tactile but find the smell quite aversive. Experiment with both smelly and fragrance free items.

1. Stickers
2. Gak, Goo or other slimy/dough type material. These can be purchased commercially or made from children's recipe books.
3. Rubber sticky toys- snakes, cartoon characters, animals- These can often be found in science type toy stores or inside "Gak" containers.
4. Ball mitts with sticky fronts used to catch the balls (or anything else you might throw at it!)
5. Tape applied to various other materials.
6. Sand, beans, rice, couscous, ball pits- Some children enjoy playing in and/or "burying" different parts of the body in these types of mediums.
7. Wrapping up in blankets, towels, vests, hugs, or squishing under/ between pillows or cushions
8. Swimming/water play
9. Climbing inside/through tents or tunnels

Smell/Taste - Some children are particular drawn to strong odors or "unique" odors. For these children, any toys that smell may be reinforcing.

Sound - Some children enjoy toys that make strange noises or "talking toys" but others find them highly aversive, especially if the sound is sudden, loud or unexpected. When introducing these types of toys it is often beneficial to keep them far away from the child at first then watching to see how the child responds. For loud toys, taping paper, cardboard or foam over the speaker to decrease the noise may result in the child responding to the toy. Many children respond to music but not "speaking". If so, using a melodic or "sing-song" voice when talking to the child may increase the likelihood that he will respond. Rapid, "adult talk" may be extremely aversive to some children. Experiment with different tones of voice, pitches, and rates as you observe the response of the child.

1. Music sticks, rain makers, musical instruments
2. Talking toys, toy computers, toy animals that make sounds
3. Music of varying tempos- some children have very specific preferences so try different types.

