



# DEVELOPMENTAL TOY GUIDE

Toy Ideas from Birth to 3 years

# HELLO, I AM NICOLE



I am a paediatric physiotherapist. I am also a mum of 2 beautiful little ones. I have many requests from parents and relatives for the best toys at certain ages. However there are a lot of toys on the market, which can make choosing one for your beautiful bub overwhelming. Will they like it? What is it meant to do?

## **I am not a toy critic**

Rather than telling you to buy this toy or that toy, I want to give you the gift of understanding why! Why certain toys are better at different ages OR stages. So next time you step into Kmart, a boutique store or an Op-Shop you are not overwhelmed by it ALL. You know exactly what you are looking for, what might work for your child.

I mean, I cannot guarantee success- every baby is unique in their personality and development. But this guide, combined with knowing your child, will give you a better chance at picking something that will hold your little ones interest for more than 60 seconds.

## **This developmental toy guide is not a gift catalogue.**

For each section I will showcase some of my favourite toys. Some will be from small businesses, and others through Amazon and other #affiliate links. These are just examples to showcase certain designs/ features.

The majority of these toys can be repurposed and will grow with your child.

Toy libraries and borrowing to try before you buy can be a life saver. So can observing your child in everyday life... what are they doing? Are there any receptive patterns? Is there a big transition or life event coming up?

Toys and play can have so many benefits for your little one but also, if you cant afford all these toys, everyday objects are also amazing. If you are interested in playing with what you have and the toy staples check out our play galleries in the academy.

*Happy Playing!*

Nicole

[JOIN THE PLAY ACADEMY](#)

 @nicole\_kidsphysio



**HEALTHACADEMY**

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# Buying Toys

So what do I look for in a toy?

## Longevity

Will it grow with your child? If not, is it worth the investment? Can it be used in different ways? Is it tough enough to survive my children and be passed on to cousins or friends?

## Likeability

Things that go whizz, beep and light up are very likeable by baby, but will mum and dad appreciate the endless repetitive songs? Or that toy that goes off in the night, and scares the daylights out of everyone?

## Learning

Is the toy meeting my child's developmental needs right now? If not, will it very soon? Is it open ended? For example, a Grimms stacking rainbow won't be stacked until closer to 18 months to 2, however pieces can be banged much earlier on.

## Cost & Safety

There are many many options for toys and the availability now allows options of similar toys to meet most budgets. Longer lasting, sturdier toys can be a bit pricier but might be worth the investment. Is it safe? Has it been made with safe materials? Is there a risk that it (or part of it) may be swallowed?

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# Subscriptions

For some, the idea of trying to figure out what toys your baby might be interested in at different stages can be overwhelming.

Hence why I made this toy guide

But for some, in this early era of new parenthood you are looking to ease the stress where ever you can and there are some wonderful companies that deliver play kits, designed for your baby or toddlers age, straight to your door. Kinda like the hello fresh of toys but with way less dishes and a load more fun.

**Lovevery** is my favourite toy subscription. It is high end in terms of price, \$130 per play kit from 0-12 months (6 play kits in the first 12 months) or \$195 per play kit from 1-2 years (4 play kits over this time) however the quality of the toys is top notch, they are built to last, safe and sustainable. Plus you do not have to think at all. Lovevery has done all the work for you and you get stage appropriate purposeful, development optimising toys delivered to your door.



**The Looker Play Kit**  
Weeks 0-12



**The Charmer Play Kit**  
Months 3-4



**The Senser Play Kit**  
Months 5-6



**The Inspector Play Kit**  
Months 7-8



**The Explorer Play Kit**  
Months 9-10

LOVEVERY

Explore the Play Kits



**The Thinker Play Kit**  
Months 11-12



**The Babbler Play Kit**  
Months 13, 14, 15



**The Adventurer Play Kit**  
Months 16, 17, 18



**The Realist Play Kit**  
Months 19, 20, 21



**The Companion Play Kit**  
Months 22, 23, 24

# Newborns

*You are your baby's very first "toy". You are their playmate. Your early interactions, through providing opportunities to play & develop, with the security that you are there for them, to protect and guide them are key! This will lay the foundation for connection and independent play.*

The best toys for a newborn are a face and a voice, preferably their caregivers. There is strong evidence to show this. There is also evidence to show a positive correlation between social and motor development. Play is a major part of your little one's development. From cognitive and physical development, to emotional and social growth- the importance of play is undisputed.

***Even newborns can learn about themselves and the world around them through play.***

They learn through reflexive actions, like kicking or moving their arms about, or by using their eyes and ears. It doesn't have to be complicated. Especially during those early months, setting aside some time each day to get down on the floor (or bring baby up to your eye level in a safe environment) to play and read with your little one, can make a huge impact.

Newborns can only see a very short distance, between 20- 30cm, they are very near sighted. Their eyes are sensitive to bright lights and in those early days, they can only see in black and white and shades in between. Red is the next colour that stands out to babies. Babies will also turn their heads in response to sounds. Apart from playing with you, telling stories, and singing rhymes, setting up a welcoming environment and play area can encourage independent exploration from an early age.

**FREE**  
**DOWNLOAD**



## CONTRAST

Contrast cards, with black, white and red dominating, in geometric shapes, draw baby's attention easily. They stimulate visual development, helping to train vision, eye muscles and communication links in the brain



## surface

Soft but firm and warm. Apart from you, a sheepskin or playmat is a fabulous option for floor play. Mats that are waterproof, washable or wipeable are the best



## gym

Baby Gyms are fabulous as you can hang high contrast toys or noisy toys from them for bub to look at or interact with. They also encourage baby to bring their hands together.



## feel

Toys that stimulate your baby's skin and touch system are hugely beneficial in this early period to help baby develop a sense of understanding of self.

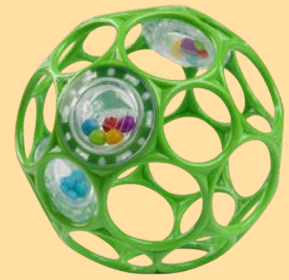


## look

Mirrors satisfy a baby's preferences for faces, support visual tracking and development of body awareness (especially as baby grows and realises it's them in the mirror)

## staples

Ribbons & Links are a staple of your baby play kit. Both connect to your baby gym, connect to each other and are easy grasp toys.



## knock

Toys that easily make noise when they are kicked or knocked are also fabulous to draw babies attention and understanding of cause/effect - bubs start to understand when they move they make noise.



## grab

Soft, lightweight, easy to grip toys are most suitable for this age group. Easy to grasp toys are fantastic for assisting development of hand muscles, proprioception (body awareness) and grasp/reaching.



## listen

Toys that easily make noise when they are kicked or knocked are also fabulous to draw babies attention and understanding of cause/effect - bubs start to understand when they move they make noise.



# 3 - 6 months

*My main considerations for toys at this stage of development include:*

- *Graspability*
- *Mouthability*
- *Cause & Effect*
- *Encourage weight shift but still within reach*

After 3 months of age, babies begin to develop colour vision and they are able to see further. Babies also start to recognise things, like you, milk in a bottle, themselves in a mirror.

Bold and bright colours are wonderful as they are easy to see (imagine you've desaturated a photo by 70% to understand what your baby sees). They are also starting to understand how far away an object is and the size of an object – fabulous for hand eye coordination.

Reaching with an open hand begins around 3- 5 months, however at times they might have difficulty letting go. Early on, light weight toys that can be easily grasped with lots of different hand or finger movements are ideal.

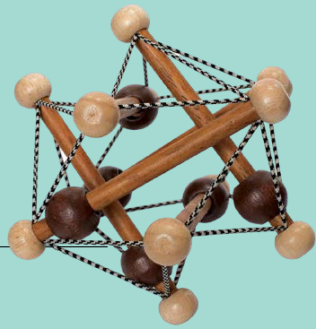
Around this time, baby may start to get bored being in the same place, even though they cannot move. Try rotating baby's toys, the room baby is in or heading outdoors or into some water play for some different stimulation for baby.



## long lasting

these are some of my favourite toys that you can introduce in this time that last ALL the way through to till the end of toddlerhood (and beyond!)





## reach

Toys designed to be easily grasped with two hands to encourage bringing the toy to the mouth and eventually passing hand to hand are initially what you are looking for.



## water mat

Water mat's are fabulous in tummy time for reflux bubs but also for all babies to encourage reach and weight shift... hello rolling!



## feet

Of all things... babies love to grab their feet! You can encourage feet grasping through kisses and tickles or make feet more attractive with simple things like ribbons or bells on socks. There are toys you can pop on their feet too.



## move

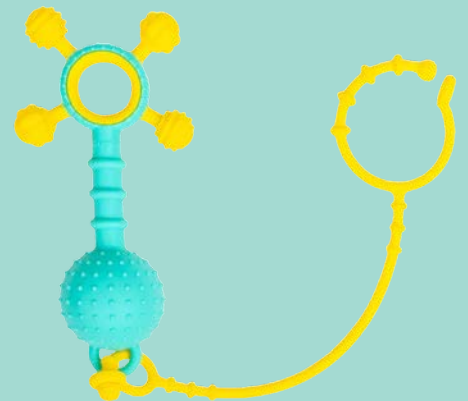
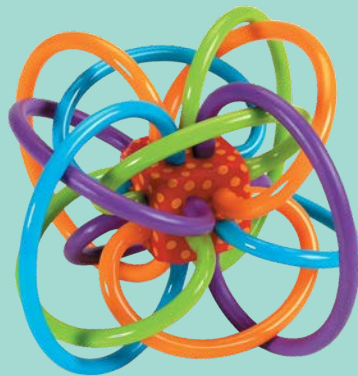
In this developmental stage you want to pick toys that provide the right amount of incentive without causing too much frustration. If they also make a sound when they are hit / grabbed / pushed this is a bonus.





## mouthing

You have to expect that baby will put anything and everything in their mouth. A baby's mouth is their window to the world and mouthing allows babies to experience their world like no other activity. Mouthing begins around 4 months, so priorities to consider are safety (what is the toy made of?) and wash-ability. [Find out more about mouthing here.](#)



# 6- 12 months

*This phase of babyhood is alllll about movement.*

Your baby's vision has now developed for added depth perception and full colour. They can see how far away things are and changes in the floor level and start to compare the size of objects. Baby is no longer just reaching, they are also grasping, tugging, pushing, patting, shaking and squeezing objects. **Exploring cause and effect**, if I do this what will happen?

Although there is a lot more going on with the hands, fine motor skills are still basic, with baby using their whole hand to grasp rather than a **pincer (thumb and finger) grip**. Towards 9 months, the pincer grip will appear and baby may also start poking and banging objects together, including their hands! Baby will start to sit, and by golly now they can use both hands! They will start **passing objects from one hand to the other** and may start using gestures like **pointing and waving**. Initially they will reach with two hands at once and by 7-9 months they will be reaching with one hand. They can also see a lot more in sitting – so if you are not already, now is the time to move toys away from bub to create opportunities for developing balance, movement and exploration.

By 9 months most bubs will **be on the move** in some way, shape or form whether it be rolling, creeping or crawling. Most will be also be taking weight through their legs. Repetition is everything at this age. Baby will **repeat** big movements and little movements to explore the world around them. By 12 months your baby will be exploring further and may even be up on their feet!

## long lasting

these are some of my favourite toys that you can introduce in this time that last ALL the way through to till the end of toddlerhood (and beyond!)





## puzzles

Your little one is working on understanding how things fit together.



## knocking down

At this age baby loves to knock things down. CRASH not so much building up but lots of knocking down which has some fabulous language foundations (see baby talk tips in the play academy)



## cause & effect

Your baby is now a little scientist "If I do this what happens?" Providing simple objects for bub to press, pull, shake or throw and that DO something is great .



## in & out

Putting in & pulling out is loads of fun.

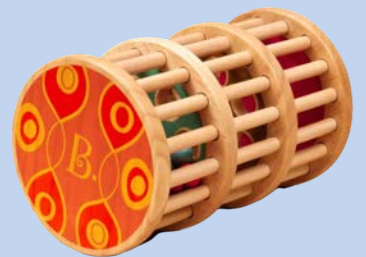




Between 6- 9 months, your baby will discover how to move. Whether that be by rolling, creeping or crawling, this is the age where you need to have eyes in the back of your head. Toys that roll or move, such as windup toys, balls or electric toys are what you want. They also help baby's vision & motor systems as bub watches the toy move and coordinates their muscles to move after it

## move

Large toys such as activity tables, play kitchens or work benches encourage bub to go up and down from lower levels to higher levels, strengthening their legs. Suction toys on glass sliding doors or large, safe magnets on fridges or baby gates to encourage cruising on an upright surface - so bub can't use their arms, which is great to develop balance for walking



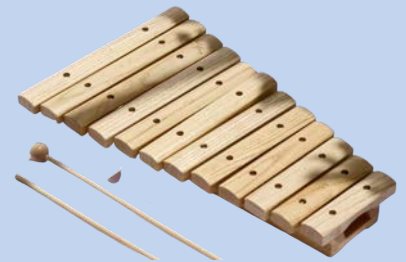
# finding

Around this time, baby also develops “object permanence”, this is the ability to know an object still exists, even if it disappears. Baby will look for a ball hidden under a sensory scarf, for food that was in their bowl or the cup they dropped off the side of the high chair. Toys that encourage this discovery, by showing baby that while things disappear for a moment they will come back captivate baby’s interest at this age. Rhyming songs with puppets and books with flaps help this skill.



# music

From 6 months on, you will notice your little one may be interested in hearing and making music. All the musical toys from previous ages carry over, however these are my favourite for sitters, walkers and beyond



# 1st birthday ideas





# 12 - 18 months

## First steps and first words open new doors

This age, 12- 18 months, is often dominated by gross motor skills as baby increasingly wants to go more, see more, play more and interact more. **Crawling, pulling to stand, cruising, walking with support and walking** will happen in this time frame.

There is also **climbing**. Did we mention climbing? Oh dear. Your tiny infant is now scaling things and your heart cant take it. But let me reassure you, experienced 12-month-old crawlers gauge possibilities for crawling down slopes and drop-offs with near-perfect accuracy and avoid, slide down, or back down obstacles that are beyond their abilities—discriminating safe from risky slopes (Adolph 2014) So encourage this. Let them experiment and explore. Unfortunately these crawling skills don't carry across when they begin to walk.

Baby's fine motor skills continue to improve, refining the **pincer grip, banging, crashing, pulling and posting**. Blocks are great however baby will not begin to stack 3-4 blocks till closer to 1-1.5 years. Baby loves to dump items out of a container and putting them back in, and then repeating the process. Baby might start marking on paper.

They do things they enjoy. Basic memory skills are developing and when a toy is hidden or not within view, they know the toy still exists and they seek it. At the end of this period, these children begin to imitate gestures and use things, like a phone. When baby starts walking, their language understanding and social interaction skyrockets!

## long lasting

these are some of my favourite toys that you can introduce in this time that last ALL the way through to till the end of toddlerhood (and beyond!)





## puzzles

Using simple shapes initially, like the circle, which is easiest as it doesn't have any corners, and progressing to other shapes. Assists with fine motor and problem solving skills. Bubs hands and eyes have to work together whilst also working on shape recognition and positioning skills



## stacking

Baby starts to do more complex stacking - in and on, carefully balancing objects



## draw

Your little one will start to practice scribbling. Thick crayons and chalk are super to support early grip



## hands

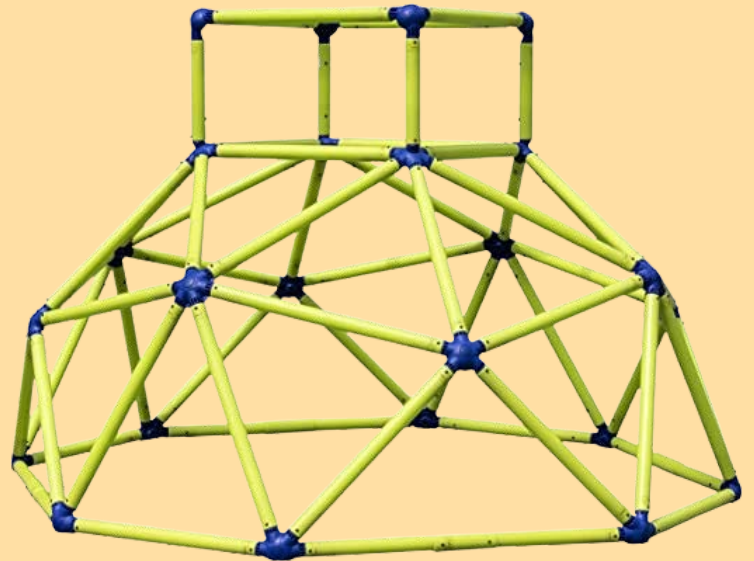
find basic grasping easy and start to develop more complex fine motor skills like banging, twisting, turning, sliding and cranking.





## move

Challenge your little ones balance, body awareness and physical skills with risky play. Not sure how to support risk play? Check out the play academy.



# 18 - 24 months

*During this time we tend to see an explosion in language skills and the desire to be more and more independent with daily tasks like dressing and feeding*

Our little ones are moving more confidently, exploring and experimenting at will and this independence with movement really supports so many other areas of development. Toddlers are building their **bank of words, understanding routines and tasks** and certainly exerting their will on the world! With increased independence comes big feelings too. Frustration, anger, excitement, shame, possessiveness... expect your toddler to have important, overwhelming and unfamiliar feelings they need to express without all the well-developed language tools to do this very successfully.

Just because they've conquered some of those major movement milestones (like walking) doesn't mean things stop there. Your little one can now **move at speed** (eek!) and is likely to engage more in some risky play and movement – think **climbing and stairs and playgrounds!**

Toddlers will **use more gestures** in everyday situations and will continue to **copy like mad** – extending this imitation into the beginning of imaginative and symbolic play – using napkins as baby blankets or blocks as phones, putting dolls to bed in containers.

Play can be repetitive – **practicing tasks and schemas\*** (connecting, positioning, rotating etc.) over and over to understand and make meaning of the world around them.

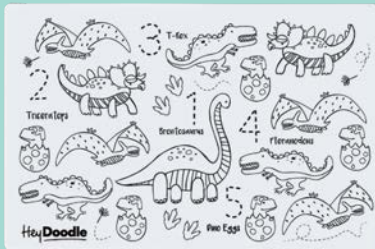
Toddler play should also be full of **variety and scientific testing** - “what happens if...” and moving between different toys and activities, showing interest in a range of opportunities available to them.

\*for more schema info join the Toddler Play Academy.



# problem solving

Toys that use concepts like 'in' and 'out' or 'on' and 'off' with an element of trickiness – orientation, rotation, shape sorting can give toddlers opportunities to poke, prod, turn, push, pull, shake, stack and problem solve



# fine motor

Toddlers' fine motor skills continue to improve, refining their ability to stack, turn book pages, hold crayons, push buttons and help take off socks, shoes and pants. They will enjoy feeding themselves with more independence, using cups, spoons and forks (prepare for the mess!).



# practical

Involving your toddler in the daily practical aspects of life helps to build their capabilities. Safely cutting, helping with the chores, pouring their own drink... this type of "play" and learning build confidence.



# imitation play

Early pretend play, imitation play, is when your toddler starts to mirror, repeat and practice the things you do! As they learn and discover more they will make believe with realistic items. For example, a toddler might feed a doll with a spoon or rock a doll to sleep. Two year-olds learn to use objects to stand for other things, for example, to use a block as a car by pushing it along the floor



# 2nd birthday ideas



## 2 - 3 years

*Terrific twos !! What a wonderful year of discovery and growth! Development of big feelings remains a big part of what you'll see in your toddler here, as they continue to understand the world around them and their effect on it.*

Our little ones still don't have a good grasp on their emotions or an ability to explain or reason with their language which can make managing or supporting emotions and behaviours tricky. Your little one continues to see the world with wonder and delight as their minds grasp more complex concepts like time, size, same and different, understanding categories and recognising their reflections as themselves. They can start to match and sort things and imitate more complex activities.

Their ability to communicate more helps them to question and query the things they can see and do. You'll start to get a lot of 'who, what, where' which involves them in conversation more and more. Toddlers are starting to put multiple words together to make simple sentences at this point and will be able to retell some simple events and answer questions about things they know and remember. They will have lots of labelling words (names for objects) and descriptive words. Their understanding of concepts like 'in' 'on' 'under' etc is also starting to appear.

Between 2 and 3 your little one will continue to build on their self care skills - attempting to brush hair, dress, use zippers, start to wash themselves and may be interested in using the toilet. They will love to join in with household jobs like dish washing, gardening and table setting and may love to complete these as part of everyday work or replicate in their imaginative play.

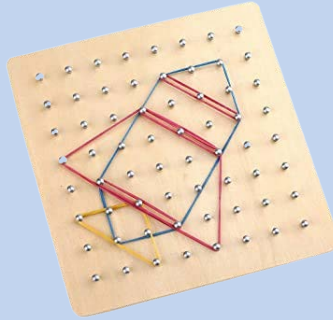
Two to three year olds are starting to run, jump, leap and experiment with ball skills - throwing, catching and kicking with more success.







# fine motor



# problem solving



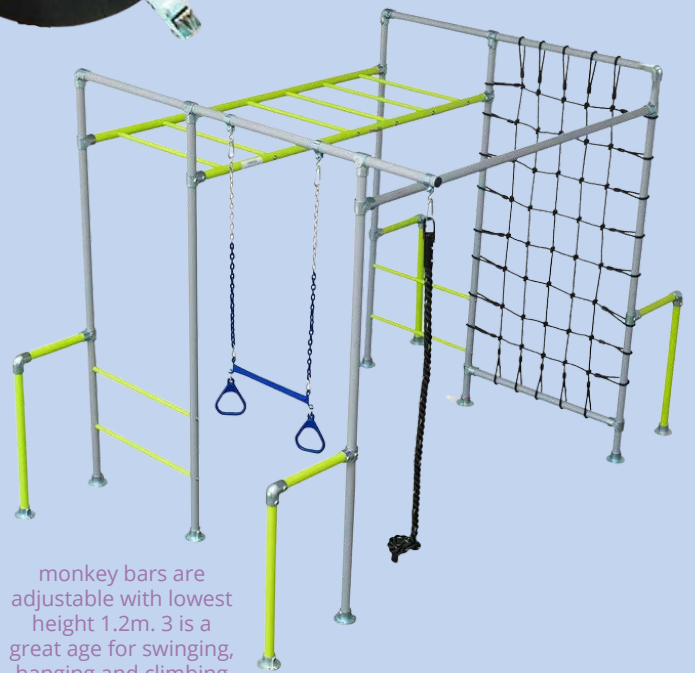


## pretend play

Between 2 and 3 years your little one's pretend play skills go from more imitation to re-enacting; celebrations, pretend to get ready for work or school by making breakfast, packing lunch, grabbing a purse, and communicating good-bye before heading out the door.



# 3rd birthday ideas



monkey bars are adjustable with lowest height 1.2m. 3 is a great age for swinging, hanging and climbing

# PLAY

## Outdoor & Water



# Alternatives

Toys can be expensive. Toys can feel overwhelming. You may feel like you have so many toys you just don't know what to do with them! If this is the case your baby may also feel this way.

Here are several options to help ease these concerns:

## **Toy Library**

There are so many different toy libraries, some have membership fees, some are run by businesses, some are community/volunteer run. It is difficult to get information that encompasses all the options so my best advice would be to google what is available in your area and what suits your needs.

## **Toy Rotation**

Try to have between 5 - 10 toys available at any one time and store the rest. Pick toys from different categories (ie. fine motor, problem solving, sensory) and store the rest of the toys away. Rotate your toys available to baby each week.

## **Mothers Group Swaps**

It might be worth committing in your mothers group to buying one quality toy each for each developmental period and rotating them through each week. Organisation, hygiene and wash-ability are big considerations here.

## **Buy Nothing**

Get on your local facebook buy nothing group, if you are looking for a particular toy, chances are it is gathering dust in someone's shed. Don't be afraid to ask!

*Want more? Join the*  
**Play Academy**



The Play Academy is an evidence based, accurate and accessible online program designed to support your child's development from birth to 3 years old. It is easy and fun and our team of paediatric experts are there to answer all your questions.

So instead of worrying about the NEXT thing, you can be in the present moment with your baby child... the real magic.

**[JOIN NOW](#)**

# DISCLAIMER



This guide is designed to empower parents and caregivers through education on why toys might be beneficial and relevant at certain ages.. You don't need to buy every toy and please look at the alternatives of DIYing, loaning and borrowing toys.

Your child is exploring, full of curiosity and the confidence to give many things a go, with no idea what will happen. It is important that toys and play things are sturdy, made from safe materials and do not pose choking, entrapment or strangulation risks. The younger your little one is, the more supervision and support will be needed. Things like water, hammocks and strings need close supervision. We have not specifically tried every toy in our toy guide so please check the age recommendations, your child's individual capabilities and supervise for safety.

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*Thank you and keep in touch*

I hope you have enjoyed this developmental toy guide. I hope that it has made intentional with choosing toys based on your bubs skill and stage. If you would like, please tag me on your Instagram: @nicole\_kidsphysio I would love to see you and your little one enjoying playing!

*Nicole Pates*



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