

Complex Child E-Magazine

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Inexpensive and Easily Available Toys That Work for Children with Special Needs

by Susan Agrawal

When a birthday or holiday rolls around, I can usually get a nice assortment of age-appropriate toys for my typically-developing children for less than \$100. But just one adapted toy for my child with cerebral palsy can be anywhere from \$50 to \$200.

In an attempt to find some alternatives, I asked a group of moms what off-the-shelf toys worked well for their children, who have a wide range of disabilities, including physical, behavioral, developmental, and sensory disabilities. I've included a variety of their favorites in this article.

Balls

Balls seem to be a universal favorite among children. Many families suggested a variety of balls, including Koosh balls, bumpy balls, light-up balls, and O-ring balls. These textured balls are great for children with limited physical abilities, and can also be used for sensory exploration. They are inexpensive, rarely running more than \$10, and easy to find, even at dollar stores and places like Walmart, Toys“R”Us, or Target.



Light-Up and Vibrating Toys

Many children with special needs enjoy sensory play and exploration, particularly toys that vibrate, light up, and make music. Some favorites are pictured below. The first, a pair of Elmo's Tickle Hands, fits over a child's hands and vibrates and laughs when they touch objects. They retail for about \$30. The original tickle products in the same line, such as Tickle Me Elmo, are also fun for children.

Cloud B is another company that produces high-quality sensory toys. A favorite is the Twilight Turtle, which projects star constellations on the ceiling. They also have animal-shaped aroma pillows, animals that produce soothing sounds and a vibrating bear cub, all priced from \$20-\$40.



Fisher-Price Elmo's Tickle Hands



Twilight Turtle by Cloud B

Another favorite is the Cepia Glo-E Magical Bear, from the makers of the Zhu Zhu pets. It lights up in seven different colors and goes through five different light patterns. It also includes a remote control wand that allows you to turn it on from a distance. Other animals, such as a monkey and polar bear, are also available, from \$15-\$50.



Cepia 16-Inch Glo-E Magical Bear

Two other favorites in this category include storm globes and the Room Tech Beingz Lamp. Storm globes are widely available, usually for less than \$10, and consist of a globe filled with LED lights that spin to form light patterns.

The Room Tech Beingz Lamp is a great sensory toy for children who are very physically impaired. Its top is touch sensitive, and the slightest touch creates patterns of lights and music. There are several different modes, but all require light touch and no pressing to trigger the lights and music. The patterns change continuously for variety. While originally available for about \$50, it has been selling through online stores for as little as \$14.



Meteor Storm Globe



Room Tech Beingz Lamp

Simple Button Toys

Another group of toys, many intended for infants, are items with simple buttons that activate music, lights, and sounds. This group contains a wide range of items that are priced from as little as \$10 to as much as \$100. Two items are pictured below, the Fisher Price Ocean Wonders Aquarium and the same manufacturer's Little Superstar Sing-Along Stage. The aquarium uses a simple large push button to trigger soothing ocean sounds, music, movement and lights, and retails for about \$40. The Sing-Along Stage is a large mirror that can be used in a sitting position that retails for about \$35. It has large buttons that produce a variety of different lights and sounds, and includes a microphone. The legs can be removed for use on the floor or on a wheelchair tray.



Fisher-Price Ocean Wonders Aquarium

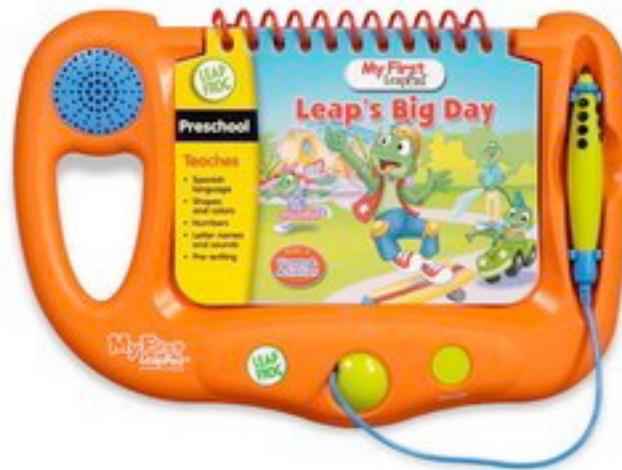


Fisher-Price Little Superstar Sing-Along Stage

Learning Toys

Leapfrog has created many toys that make learning a little bit easier, especially for kids with physical impairments or non-traditional learning styles. While many of their products are exceptional, we've highlighted just a few favorites.

The first is the LeapPad system, which includes a bookstand, changeable books, and touch pen. The pen may be used to read the book aloud and make sounds. This not only encourages learning, but it can also help develop fine motor skills. A similar device, the Tag pen, uses a stand-alone pen to interact with special books. There is also a Tag Junior, with a larger and easier to hold pen, with books that focus on preschool concepts such as simple words, colors, letters and shapes.



LeapPad

For younger children, the Spin and Sing Alphabet Zoo is a simple spinning ball that teaches letters, letter sounds, and plays music. The simple spinning motion is extremely easy, even for children with little ability to use their hands and arms.



LeapFrog Spin and Sing Alphabet Zoo

Many other LeapFrog products, including the Fridge Phonics and the My Pal, Learning Baby, and Learning Friends series of learning animals, are also easy to use for children with physical impairments.

Miscellaneous Toys

Children who need help developing social skills or who just enjoy imaginative play may like the extensive line of Playmobil toys, ranging in price from \$5-\$200. With toys depicting practically every real-life situation, Playmobil toys are extremely useful for preparing children for new experiences and helping them learn about the world. They may also help children to engage in abstract, imaginative play. Pictured below is part of the line of hospital toys, which include a hospital room, child in wheelchair, medical office, operating room, and the below pictured medical team and patients.



Playmobil Medical Set

For children who are high-energy, sensory-seekers, or who like movement, the Jumpolene is a great choice. It allows bouncing that is much safer than a trampoline. The Jumpolene can also be filled with balls to make an inexpensive ball pit. It is available in multiple styles for different age groups, and retails for about \$35-\$75 depending on the model.



Jumpolene

Finally, many children love to play with bead mazes and similar manipulatives. The Melissa and Doug Bead Maze pictured below retails for about \$15 and is great for developing hand dexterity and teaching colors, shapes, and textures. The beads are easy to move and provide hours of fun play for all ages. There are many different styles available from \$10-\$100.



Melissa and Doug Bead Maze

Finding the Right Toys

It is possible to find off-the-shelf toys that work for almost any child, but it definitely takes some creativity and searching. We hope these suggested toys will make the process a bit easier!