

# Tapping into the Parent Market

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Let's start by agreeing that children and parents need to play, and play together — whether as babies, preschoolers, toddlers, or teenagers. Play continues to be important throughout children's lives for their fullest development. I urge you to think creatively about how to reinforce play as an added feature in your store.

Rumors abound about children not playing and learning, but instead being addicted to video games and computers. You need to restore the value and importance of "real play" and underscore how you support learning through play. Although electronics and computers are valuable for children, they are not a substitute for creating crafts, or playing with games, puzzles, and puppets, or tossing a Frisbee. Toys are really important for children of all ages, and continue to be important for adults. What's important is to offer a good variety of play products for children — products that reflect activity, creativity and education.

Consider how you can support parents in their role as "first teacher" by finding new ways to offer playthings of value that enable them to meet their goals of helping their children learn and develop. Play and learning are strengthened at home and in school with the right tools found at your educational store.

You can increase your support by expanding your inventory to offer a wider variety of play products. With the right tools you can offer your customers a lifetime of play, from childhood to senior days.

In addition to an expanded inventory, you can add manufacturers' demonstrations of toys, games, and other products; get children involved in play with hands-on product experiences; provide special play product promotions; and market toys as "fun-to-use learning tools" to ensure children become more excited and fully appreciative of the value of play and toys.

It's very important that children have "active" play. This area has not been fully developed. All children need to be physically active for healthy development. This is important today because children around the world are quickly getting out of shape because they're too passive. Having products

on hand that help children to maintain physical development helps at home, playground and school.

Children also need time for "creative" play, including arts, crafts, musical instruments, CDs, and other assorted media that expand appreciation of the arts and creative expression. Easels and other creative products that are found in the classroom also have a place at home to expand and display the child's creative spirit.

There is an abundance of "educational" materials of all kinds from books to electronics. Your selection of these products will depend on many factors. The value ultimately rests on their impact on the child and how they facilitate the learning process.

## Dr. Toy's Tips for Play and Learning

Making the transition between home and school is often a challenging one, especially on weekends, during vacations, and in the summertime. Pressures can build up for everyone in the family so finding time for play is important for the well-being of children and parents. To relax from these pressures, we all need a balance of indoor and outdoor play to assure this well-being.

Playing with toys, games, and creative products helps to ease the transition between seasons, between home and school, and provides balance in a child's day. The end of the school day often means a continuation of school in the form of homework, or the start of chores to be done at home. It also marks the beginning of play activities. Play time can be a positive, constructive, and a useful transition.

You know how you feel at the end of a long day—like shifting gears into more relaxing activities. Children experience the same need to unwind after a day spent working hard at school. The right playthings support relaxation and make for a happier and more positive home environment.

You can find ways to provide tools to your customers to assist children with the transition between school and

home, and to empower parents and teachers to substantially contribute to children's learning and play experiences. These tips may be offered along with your careful selection of play products and with other useful customer information provided at your store. You may also want to consider offering copies of my book, *Smart Play/Smart Toys*.

Planning constructive fun and informal activities after school will make a critical difference between stress and balance in a child's life. Finding time for all that is needed to learn and to accomplish is a challenge for all children. These skills at scheduling and balance are the preparation for work and life ahead.

Offer parents suggested items for their child's "Play Chest." There are many play products that provide interesting learning and play activities that combine skill building and fun. Board games are a good example. I recommend providing products parents can take along for play while traveling at anytime or that can be enjoyed when they reach their destination.

Toys and children's products must enhance the child's play experiences, and, of course, be fun—a certain tangible, yet elusive quality essential in all children's products. What is important to longevity and good mental and physical health is the amount of playfulness a child and adult experience. There are many excellent examples of products and activities to make available in your store. You may find selected award winning products on [www.drtoy.com](http://www.drtoy.com). Most of all, open the doors to play and let play begin at your store.

Finally I offer one of my favorite quotes from George Bernard Shaw, the British playwright: "We do not stop playing when we get old; we get old when we stop playing!"

Stevanne Auerbach, PhD, known as Dr. Toy,<sup>™</sup> speaker, author and consultant has written 15 books, among them *Dr. Toy's Smart Play/Smart Toys: How to Raise a Child with a High PQ (Play Quotient)*. Visit: [www.drtoy.com](http://www.drtoy.com).