Gift Ideas by Ages as Well as Stages

 It’s gift-giving season. Yes, we could write a soppy post about how the best gifts in life are not material. Or that you should donate money to charity in a child’s name. However, sometimes you just want to buy something. To help you find a perfect gift, or at least one a kid will play with this season, we present a review of child development and a corresponding set of gift ideas.

0-3 months: Babies this age have perfect hearing and enjoy looking at faces and objects with contrasting colors. Music, mobiles, and bright posters are some age appropriate gift ideas.

3-6 months: Babies start to reach and grab at objects, so they enjoy rattles and toys that are big enough to hold onto and safe enough to put in their mouths- try bright colored teething rings and large plastic “keys.” Because babies learn by mouthing objects, buy your niece some first books made of cloth or vinyl knowing they will be heavily drooled on.

6-12 months: Around six months, babies begin to sit alone or sit propped. Intellectually, they begin to understand “cause and effect.” Good choices of gifts include toys with large buttons that make things happen with light pressure. Toys which make sounds, play music, or cause Elmo to pop up will be a hit. For a nine-month-old old just starting to pull up to standing, a water or sand table will provide hours of entertainment in the upcoming year. Right now you can bring

winter inside and fill it with a mound of snow. Buy some inexpensive measuring cups and later in the summer your toddler will enjoy standing outside splashing in the water.

12-18 months: This is the age kids learn to stand and walk. They enjoy things they can push while walking such as bubble blowers, plastic lawn mowers or plastic “poppers” that have little balls inside that pop around when pushed.

18-24 months: Kids this age still like to push toys while walking, and although kids can not pedal, they enjoy riding on toys such as big wheels “Fred Flintstone” style. Dexterous enough to drink out of a cup and use a spoon and fork, toddlers can always use another place setting. Toddlers are also able to manipulate shape sorters and toys where they put a plastic ball into the top and the ball goes down a short maze/slide. They also love containers to collect things, dump out, then collect again.

2-3 years: To encourage motor skills, offer tricycles, balls, bubbles, boxes to crawl into and out of. Go with crayons over markers because crayons require a child to exert pressure and therefore develop hand strength. Dolls, cars, and sand boxes all foster imagination. Don’t forget those indestructible board books so kids can “read” to themselves.

3-4 years: Now kids engage in elaborate imaginary play. They enjoy “dress up” clothes to create characters- super heroes, dancers, princesses, kings, queens, animals. They become adept at pedaling tricycles or even riding small training-wheeled bikes. Other gift ideas include crayons, paint, markers, Play-doh®, or side-walk chalk. Children this age understand rules and turn-taking and can be taught simple card games such as “go fish,” “war,” and “matching.” Three-year-olds know colors but can’t read- so they can finally play the classic board game Candyland®, and they can rote count in order to play the sequential numbers game Chutes and Ladders®.

5-year-olds: Since 5-year-olds can hop on one foot games like Twister® will be fun. Kids this age start to understand time. In our world of digital clocks, get your nephew an analog clock with numbers and a minute hand… they are hard to come by. Five-year-olds also begin to understand charts– a calendar will also cause delight. They can also work jig-saw puzzles with somewhat large pieces.

8 years old: Kids at this point should be able to perform self help skills such as teeth brushing. Help them out with stocking stuffers such as toothbrushes with timers. They also start to understand the value of money. The kids will appreciate gifts such as a wallet or piggy bank. Eight-year-olds engage in rough and tumble play and can play outdoor games with rules. Think balls, balls, balls- soccer balls, kickballs, baseballs, tennis balls, footballs. Basic sports equipment of any sort will be a hit.

10-year-olds: Fine motor skills are quite developed and intricate arts and crafts such as weaving kits can be manipulated. Also ten-year-olds value organization in their world and want to be more independent. Therefore, a watch makes a good gift at this age. And don't forget about books: reading skills are more advanced at this age. They can read chapter books or books about subjects of interest to them.

Tweens: Your child now has a longer attention span (30-40 minutes) so building projects such as K'nex® models will be of

interest to her, as well as puzzles with hundreds of pieces. This is a time when group identity becomes more important. Sleepovers and scouting trips are common at this age so sleeping bags make great gifts. Tweens value their privacy – consider a present of a journal with a lock or a doorbell for her room.

Teens: If you look at factors which build a teen into a resilient adult, you will see that adult involvement in a child's life is important. Create opportunities for one-on-one interaction by giving gifts such as a day of shopping with her aunt, tickets to a show with her uncle, or two hours at the rock climbing gym with dad. Teens usually have enough "stuff" anyway.

However, if you want to give "stuff," here are some suggestions:

Since it's best for kids back to carry the weight of school books on two shoulders (see our post about backpack safety), find your teen a cool backpack.

Encourage physical activity. Sports equipment is always pricey for a teen to purchase- give the fancy sports bag he's been

eying and encourage physical activity with a gym membership.

Hunched over the computer is not an ergonomically correct way to study. Prevent your kids from growing into adults with strained necks and backs by getting a key board and chair set which is kind to their bodies.
Happy shopping.

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