

MEDICINE

Therapeutic Toys

Toys are used to stimulate handicapped children to new activity. They can be used as treatment to develop muscles as well as for development of the other senses.

By DOROTHY SCHRIVER

► TOYS mean happy children. And at Christmas underneath a glittering tree they become one of the symbols of Christmas, happiness and youthful pleasure.

At this joyful time of holiday feasting and family reunion, gaily painted toys are eagerly awaited by millions of children of all ages.

The wonder and the happiness of toys are a special gift to other children throughout the year, children who have handicaps toys help to remedy. For toys, and the pleasure they give, are good medicine.

Those who work with crippled children have discovered that the same toys bringing such pleasure at Christmas can be used to stimulate a child to new activity through imaginative play. They become effective methods of treatment. A cunning doll or a mechanical toy can be used to develop weak muscles and provide motivation.

For a child who does not have full use of his muscles, a toy is invaluable. The play material needs to be scientifically selected for the greatest muscle development. A series of studies on using toys in the treatment of handicapped children have been conducted by the American Toy Institute, research division of the Toy Manufacturers of U.S.A., Inc., in cooperation with the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults.

Find Suitable Toys

Purpose of the research was to discover what available toys were suitable for use in treatment of children with varying disabilities and to develop new toys which would be useful.

Drawings showing the pictures of body motions, together with simple explanations, were sent to toy manufacturers. They were asked to supply toys that would call for these motions in play.

Using toys in therapy is not a new idea. For a long time therapists have either made the toys they needed for treatment or used certain types of educational toys already on the market. The recent research has greatly increased the number of toys available as well as their usefulness.

Toys for handicapped children cannot be classified by age groups, but rather by development of muscular skill. Greatest satisfaction comes from toys so sturdy they will not break when dropped or go to pieces when handled unskillfully. Those that do not wobble or tip over easily are also important.

Because handicapped children often make random and unskilled movements, and have inadequate hand grasp, toys are dropped and banged more frequently and with greater force than ordinarily, which often makes the child discouraged and prevents him from making further effort.

Attractive looking toys are desirable. Bright and gaily painted toys are more successful than those lacking eye appeal.

Modeling clay, or dough, is used to stimulate motion of the fingers and strengthen grasp. As the muscles show graded improvement, blocks that are sized differently may be used to continue this therapy.

The occupational therapist uses toys as preliminary training for such activities as



To grasp and lift a doll almost her own size stimulates delighted effort in this little girl. Such attempts may also help her improve muscular coordination.

eating, dressing and other functional activities. Shoe lacing, peg toys and stringing of beads help eyes and hands work together.

Not only are toys useful for stimulating motion, but also for development of the other senses. Musical blocks are used for children who need training in hearing. Children suffering from poor vision are

given toys with clear color contrast in simple, definite shapes.

Those who have speech problems play with toys having the sounds the children need to learn how to make. Such toys are plastic fish or plastic funnels, which help them to shape the letter "f."

Games of "going to the store," where many different items are offered for sale, stimulate a child to talk as well as to make physical efforts to use the articles.

A mechanical dog or rabbit that moves along the floor is an excellent stimulation to make a child go after it even if he has never used his legs to crawl. He will lie flat on his stomach and stretch just as far as he possibly can in an effort to reach the animal.

In this way, he learns gradually to use his legs to push himself forward.

Color and Sound Helpful

Brightly colored push-pull toys that make sounds or ring bells attract and stimulate children, and thus encourage crawling and walking, as well as offering opportunity for imaginative play.

The sounds and bells aid in speech and vocalization as the children try to imitate the sounds.

Toys are as important in the home as they are in clinical therapy. There is no substitute for toys. They are the most effective equipment to use in developing improved muscular coordination.

However, in addition to a toy's therapeutic value, it is important for the child to have toys to occupy his time at home. With them he should find some degree of satisfaction in accomplishment and should be happy.

A child will learn to play imaginatively using a toy he enjoys. It is possible that he will find uses for a familiar toy that will help him move on to the next development level.

Provide Outlet for Feelings

Toys are valuable in providing for the expression of feeling. It has been found that clay is exceedingly effective as an outlet for disturbed children. Toys that provide for hammering and the use of tools, as well as toy trains, have proved to be good outlets for expressing frustration and pent-up emotions.

To be useful, toys must fit the child as well as aid in accomplishing training. The right toy is the one that will give the child something to do in imaginative play and at the same time develop abilities.

Toys are no longer merely playthings, but are now useful tools in helping handicapped children live more normal and happy lives.

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