



Toy Tips

ADAPTING TOYS AND MATERIALS TO MEET A VARIETY OF NEEDS



Play is the Way

- Play is how every child learns about their world
 - Play helps children learn:
 - Social skills
 - Fine and gross motor skills
 - Language and communication
 - Cause and effect
 - Pre-literacy and math skills
 - Creativity
 - And so much more....



Adaptation



- Some children, because of their unique needs, may need toys or materials to be adapted or modified in order to fully engage in play opportunities
- The most important thing to remember when looking to adapt a toy or material is that you should choose the adaptation that **meets the need of the child**, NOT the disability label

Adapting Toys



- Adaptation
 - Any alteration or adjustment in the structure or function of an item that results in a better fit
 - In the case of toys, it means making adjustments or modifications to allow children with differing abilities to interact and play with the item in a developmentally appropriate and relevant manner
- Always ask yourself this important question:

What can I do to help this child be successful when using or interacting with this item?

Ways to Adapt Toys and Materials

- Types of adaptations:

- Confining
- Stabilizing or securing
- Extending or enlarging
- Enhancing or adding
- Simplifying or reducing



Confining



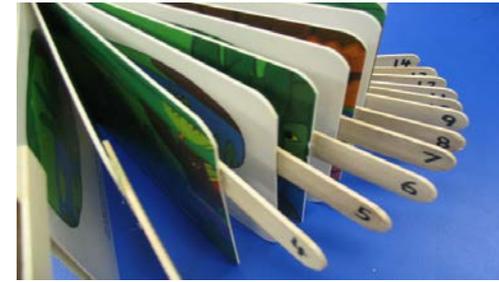
- Confining has less to do with adapting the toy as it does with adapting the area around the toy
 - If a toy moves out of reach for a child with a physical disability or a visual impairment, that toy becomes unusable or frustrating for that child
 - Frustration can lead to a child displaying challenging behaviors or simply not wanting to play with that particular toy anymore
- Possible adaptations or items to confine a toy:
 - Hula hoop placed around the toy or around the child and the toy
 - A box lid
 - Toddler pool
 - A tray with a raised edge or lip

Stabilizing



- Stabilizing means making an adaptation or modification to keep a toy in place or to stop it from tipping over too easily
 - For a child with low muscle tone or limited muscle control, a toy that moves or falls over too easily can create frustration and lead to a lack of interest
 - If a child chooses not to play with certain toys they miss out on key opportunities to learn and master important developmental skills
- Possible adaptations or items to stabilize a toy:
 - Velcro, suction cups and/or small clamps or clips
 - Non-slip shelf lining
 - Magnetic strip attached to a toy and a cookie sheet used as a base
 - Toys with wide bases
 - Placing the toy in putty or playdoh

Extending



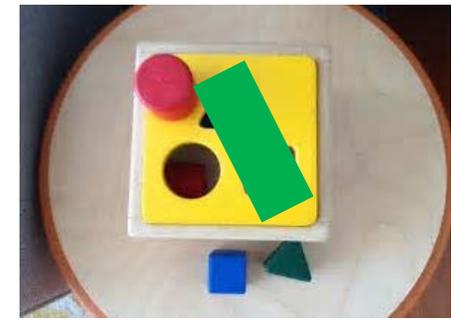
- Extending or enlarging refers to adding something to a toy so that it is easier for a child to manipulate or grasp
 - For children who have difficulty performing fine motor tasks, such as using a pincer grasp or using controlled movements, extending or enlarging pieces or parts of a toy or item can make them easier to grasp, push or turn
- Possible adaptations or items to extend or enlarge a toy:
 - Adding knobs or dowels to items such as puzzle pieces
 - Building up items, such as paint brushes, crayons, or markers, with foam hair rollers, pencil grippers, tape, putty, a sponge, etc.
 - Adding spacers, such as foam pieces, popsicle sticks, etc., to book pages so they are easier to turn
 - Extending the length of an item, such as a paintbrush, by attaching a ruler or dowel to the handle so it is easier to hold

Enhancing



- Enhancing means adding something, such as color or texture, to a toy so that it is easier to see or feel or is more appealing to the child
 - For children who need additional sensory input in order to stay focused and on task, enhancing items or toys can make a big difference
 - Children with visual impairments also benefit from toys or items that are enhanced to show a greater contrast between items
- Possible adaptations or items to enhance a toy:
 - Adding swatches of sandpaper, or other textures, to handles, knobs for puzzles, sides of blocks, tops of cars or trucks, etc.
 - Adding color to the water table, adding paint to shaving cream or coloring rocks or other items you use in the sensory table
 - Add contrasting colors to the specific parts of a toy that you want the child to engage with or focus on

Simplifying



- Simplifying usually refers to reducing the steps, removing the number of pieces necessary to complete a task, or replacing pieces for an easier fit
 - When a toy or activity requires a child to complete certain steps for the toy to work, such as putting a certain number of pieces into a puzzle or matching items by color or shape, the sheer number of pieces or steps required might be overwhelming or difficult for some children
- Possible adaptations to simplify a toy:
 - Reduce the number of pieces available to a child
 - For example, cover up a portion of a puzzle and provide the child with just those pieces that are showing. As the child becomes more successful adjust the expectations for the task by providing additional options.
 - Remove a part of a toy that makes a task too difficult for the child to complete
 - For example, remove stoppers or barriers that make an item frustrating for the child (see middle picture above). If items are difficult for a child to place into an opening or space, you can replace the item with something smaller, such as a smaller ball, so that it fits more easily or, if possible, make the opening larger. Always keep in mind the goal you have for the child and match the adaptation accordingly.

Key things to remember



- Whenever adapting or modifying a toy for a child:
 - Always keep in mind why you are adapting or modifying the item. What is the goal for the child during their play? Is it to interact with friends and learn social skills, is it to practice a fine motor skill, or is it to work on persistence and remaining on task? Any adaptations you make should ultimately support the end result or goal.
 - Keep in mind that you are looking to make the toy more accessible and functional for the child. You are ultimately trying to eliminate those things that make a task too difficult or that cause the child to become frustrated so they can spend more time practicing important developmental skills.
 - Make sure your adaptations don't interfere or get in the way of the child's play. Adaptations and modifications should support learning, not interfere with it.