

## Blocks: Great toys for all ages

### Playing with blocks helps children:

- Use physical skills as they lift, build with, and move blocks.
- Use math skills as they count, match, sort, group, add, subtract, and notice weight and length.
- Learn how to come up with and try new ideas for making a bridge or a tower.
- Learn how to work with other children as they listen to other ideas and share.

### Blocks are great toys for all ages of children.

#### Infants

Infants may start exploring blocks by putting them in their mouths. Soft blocks, that can be squeezed, tasted, and thrown, are good for infants. Older infants may like to pound hard wooden or large plastic blocks.

- Take babies to where older children are playing with blocks and tell them what is going on. Give infants some blocks to play with, but don't allow them to harm the older children's block play.
- Build a tower of soft blocks with an infant. She may enjoy knocking it down, building it up, and knocking it down again.
- Place a soft block on the floor several feet from a crawling baby. Turn it into a game that encourages the child to crawl to the block.

#### Toddlers

Toddlers may pick up blocks, carry them around, drop them, put them in something, or move them from place to place. Older toddlers may begin to stack blocks or put them together, side by side, on the floor.

- Toddlers need large blocks, made of wood, heavy cardboard, or plastic.
- Give toddlers a plastic bucket or basket to fill with blocks.
- Allow toddlers to get out blocks themselves and help put them away.
- Show toddlers how to stack blocks and how to keep a tower from falling over.
- Give toddlers lots of space for block play, so they can move around without tripping or falling into their blocks.

#### Preschoolers

Preschoolers build with blocks for a purpose. A flat row of blocks may be a road for cars. A tall block tower may be a hospital. Older preschoolers will use blocks like a fence to close in other blocks or toys. This could be a parking lot with cars inside, a cage in a zoo with animals inside, or a house. Blocks are great for preschoolers to use for pretending.

- Store blocks in an area where preschoolers can reach them easily and put them away.
- Give preschoolers toy people, animals, cars, and trucks to use during block play.
- Preschoolers may want to use beads, buttons, yarn, craft sticks, clay, small sticks, stones, etc. to add to their block play.
- Make a place for preschoolers to save their block buildings to add to them another day.
- Keep block buildings safe from younger children who may try to knock them over.

#### School-Age

As children get older, their block building becomes more involved.

- Give school-age children free time to build with blocks in any way they want.
- Ask school-age children to help preschoolers with block building.
- Show children pictures of bridges and buildings. Encourage them to try building the same bridges or buildings with blocks.

## Make your own blocks

Good wooden blocks can be expensive. You can make a great set of blocks from cardboard milk cartons and newspapers. Collect different sizes of milk cartons (half-pints, pints, quarts, half-gallons) to make different sizes of blocks.

### You'll need:

Clean, dry cardboard milk cartons — two of the same size for each block

Newspaper

Rubber bands

Self-stick paper (contact paper) to cover the finished blocks

### What to do:

1. Cut newspaper squares, the same size as the bottom of the milk carton. You'll need a large stack of newspaper squares to give the block some weight.
2. Cut the tops off the milk cartons, making a square opening.
3. On one carton, start at the opening in the top and make a slit down the corner to the bottom of the carton. Do this with all four corners. Put rubber bands around the sides to hold them up.
4. Make a stack of newspaper squares inside the slit carton. Press them down until the carton is full.
5. Turn the second carton upside down over the carton with the newspaper squares. Push it over the filled carton to cover it. You can take off the rubber bands before the second carton covers them.
6. Finish the block by covering it with self-stick paper.

