

Buying Toys for Children with Disabilities Often Leaves Shoppers Unsure

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Children are awaiting the arrival of Santa with anticipation. However, last minute shoppers may find themselves running into hurdles when it comes to choosing toys for children with disabilities. Julie Brinkhoff, associate director of the Great Plains ADA Center at the University of Missouri, says it is easy for shoppers to feel unsure about what to buy for children with disabilities.

“The first consideration should be the child’s interest,” Brinkhoff said. “Children with disabilities have their own unique interests and preferences, just like all children.”

There can be a tendency for some adults to purchase items that are geared toward ‘overcoming’ or ‘rehabilitating’ a disability. Brinkhoff says these types of gifts send the message that a child should strive to be ‘better’ or ‘different’ and that is not a message a child should receive from a present.

The toy or game should be easy to use. That may mean that the toy has adaptable features designed specifically to meet the needs of children with certain disabilities.

“There are balls that beep so they can be chased and caught by children who are blind,” Brinkhoff said. “Also, one-handed video game controllers are available to be used by children or teens with the use of only one arm. Therefore, the focus is not on the disability, but the activity itself and the enjoyment it provides.”

Brinkhoff gives the following tips from the National Lekotek Center, a resource for information on toys and play for children with disabilities:

- Does the toy have multisensory appeal (lights, sounds, scent and movement)?
- Can the toy be activated easily without frustration?
- Does the toy give a child the opportunity for success with no definite right or wrong?
- Is the toy popular so that a child with a disability will feel like ‘any other kid’?
- Does the toy allow for creativity, uniqueness and choice-making?
- Is the toy safe and durable?
- Is the toy adjustable (height, sound volume, speed, level of difficulty)?
- Does the toy provide potential for interaction or encourage social engagement with others?
- Does the toy provide activities that reflect both the developmental and chronological age of the child?

The Great Plains ADA Center is part of the MU School of Health Professions.

Provided by University of Missouri

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