

Hydrocephalus – Learning Through Play



When choosing toys and games for children with Hydrocephalus or Spina Bifida, it is important to consider not only what will provide enjoyment, but whether the toy will also help all round development.

There are aspects of play with toys or games which can be used positively for specific learning: to develop concentration; to emphasise sequencing (putting events or thought processes in step-by-step logical order); memory training; perception (size and shape); manipulation (the use of hand and fingers) and co-ordination (especially hand/eye co-ordination). Some of these are the specific learning difficulties that have now been highlighted as problems associated with Hydrocephalus.



There are many good pre-school toys and games on the market which cover the development of such skills and could help in the early years.

It must be stressed, that to gain the maximum play and learning value from these toys and games, adult supervision and guidance, reinforced by talking to the child about what he/she is doing while playing, will help the child with concentration and meaningful play.

All areas of play and development overlap, especially with a young child, where movement, hearing, seeing and thinking are all closely linked and vitally dependent on each other. Bearing this in mind, although the following toys and games have been grouped for specific learning skills, there will be other benefits:

- Mobiles encourage eye focus and movement, leading to reaching out.
- Baby gym encourages eye focus and reaching out and hand/eye co-ordination, as well as being a reward toy.
- Pop-up toys (progressing to hammer balls) encourage hand/eye co-ordination. Posting boxes: involve recognition and matching of shapes. Hand and finger control are required to post shapes.
- Picture dominoes and lottos require matching of shapes, hand/finger and direction activity. Help in learning to take 'turns'.
- Finger paints and puppets encourage hand and finger play.
- Play Doh, modelling materials develop the feeling of different textures.
- Building and construction kits are excellent for hand and finger training as well as for learning the position of objects in space and turning 2D pictures into 3D objects. *These will include: Lego, stickle bricks, Duplo, Popoids, Kinex, Meccano.*

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NB Toys containing magnets are not recommended for children with programmable (adjustable) shunts.

The next stage may be mosaics, peg boards, picture templates, stencil sets, Etcha sketch, Magna doodle, paint by numbers and board games. These help thought processes, sequencing, logic, memory, pre-reading, writing and number work.

Computerised games eg hand-held games and games consoles, will help with dexterity and hand/eye co-ordination. It is very easy to leave a child to play with these games but a computer cannot take the place of a parent's involvement and time with Game Boys etc should be limited.

To help the child's gross motor skills encourage hopping, skipping, balancing, bouncing (eg Space Hopper, trampoline), running and jumping. Children will also enjoy using scooters, ride-on toys and bicycles. The child with Hydrocephalus may need stabilisers on his/her bike well after his/her peer group have dispensed with theirs.

Imaginative play should be encouraged, although it does not always come easily to children with Hydrocephalus. However, most will enjoy using prams, toy kitchens, toy cars and garages, dolls, etc. It is amazing how easy it is to construct a 'house' or 'tent' using two chairs and a sheet!

Toys do not need to be expensive - explore the charity shops and look in your cupboards - pots and pans, plastic colanders, empty plastic bottles (fill with rice or lentils to make 'music'), wooden spoons, sheets and towels will give hours of play. Imagination costs nothing!

