

The alternative



Holiday Gift Guide 2009

This is a compilation of the Holiday Gift Guide which ran November 2009. You can view the individual blog posts online at <http://play-activities.com/blog> and comment.

This compilation is a one stop shop of ideas all in one place.

No part of this document can be changed.

I hope these ideas will give you plenty of food for thought.

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Yep 'tis the season for gifts.

Have you thought about how you can gift play?

Activity emails

Here at [Play Activities](#) I talk about the natural and everyday play activities you can do together with your child. I offer a free weekly email of activities that take little or no money plus the bonus is most of the items used we find in our homes already. Check out the right sidebar.

Time

Make it priority for you to evaluate your play with your kids. In January I offered a [play evaluation](#) to help you look at what type of play and how much of benefit the play you are currently doing. If you didn't I would suggest you pop back and look carefully at what changes you can make with your playtime.

Engaging vs Entertaining

There are so many more things to do in the day now more than ever. There are *more* toys and heavier marketing. The quality of toys are truly amazing. As a result there are so many more chances to buy toys and give kids things to do that **ENTERTAIN** them rather than *engage* them.

We all love a little entertainment and frankly so does your child but what their **brains, bodies and muscles really crave is engagement**.

From when they are lying on your lap and you are talking in that high pitched 'I love you' speak. You see their arms and legs moving about. They are engaging and trying to communicate. Their faces light up when you appear. That same baby notices that you've moved the mobile from the left of the crib because it's gone now as they lay there. The toddler pinches the bottle tops between fingers and tries to pick it up, again and again or the preschooler bites his lip while managing the scissors for the cut. These experiences are what truly impact your child's learning. When they are engaging. The motivation is coming from **them**.

Another way of looking at it is **Active vs passive learning**. Kids need more active learning than the passive learning that most of them get. By active I don't mean they have to be scheduled for classes but active that they are participating, using their bodies. Classes aren't bad over scheduling our kids is the problem.

There are lots of engaging activities that calm and can be a very [effective babysitter](#). Encouraging [creativity and concentration](#) without requiring them to be passive. Play like, playdough and clay, sticker books and puzzles, Magna Doodles, lacing and water play.

Giving away

With all the best plans there will be an influx of new toys and games if you have children every year around the holidays and around their birthdays. To avoid being overrun by toys start sorting through your toys now and think about donating. It's a great skill to develop giving.



This is the second year we have participated in [Operation Christmas Child](#). The kids have fun packing their box and are excited to know that a little boy will receive the items they picked. We sponsor a [World Vision child](#) too and during the next week they'll be drawing pictures to add to the [Christmas gift](#) and sending to her.

Scaling back

Since we have *so many toys already* talk to the toy givers now while there's time.

1. Share and discuss toy *alternatives* for your children.
2. Start a conversation about sponsoring a child; gifting a [goat](#) or a [basketball](#).
3. Gift cards in small denominations for ice cream or dessert for family nights;
4. Family passes to local museums, parks, or zoos with family year round passes or Physical activities like swimming, dance, Mommy and Me, Kindermusic, Playing with clay classes. Even a partial payment goes a long way.
5. Buy the first few books in a book series, or a favourite author, and give a gift card to buy the next one.

Unstructured play, open ended and downtime

- Allowing chunks of time to play that's not directed but safely monitored by you. No interfering.....
- Allowing plenty of **opportunities** for your child to be self motivated, passionate and totally lost in an activity of their choosing. This means you have to provide chances, opportunities and plenty of times for this to grow and take effect.
- Allowing a chance to hear, "I'm bored!" and watch, [lead and direct them to be able to navigate this time](#) so that in the future they can [never be bored again](#). (Hint: Give them choices.)

Gift giving

Encourage your children to make age appropriate gifts. My favourite gifts, when I was teaching were the gifts I knew my students had thought about and made. It was exactly that they had taken the time and I could see the effort that touched me. I loved the imperfections and the spelling mistakes it

matched them.

Choosing to give gifts with play in mind; open ended and evergreen gifts of craft boxes; books, imaginary play items.

Along with gift giving there's being [grateful for the gifts we receive](#).

You can have thank you cards with their photograph and a sweet message.

- Design and [make](#) little cards.
- Little kids can trace a letter or write a letters of their name.
- Add a few [thumbprint pictures](#) (with your help). Its easy to miss being grateful and pausing to acknowledge gifts. It is an easy thing to do at this time of year.

Making and giving gifts

Try a [votive candle holder](#) or use a baby food jar and make up a hot chocolate/coffee surprise with a candy cane stirrer.

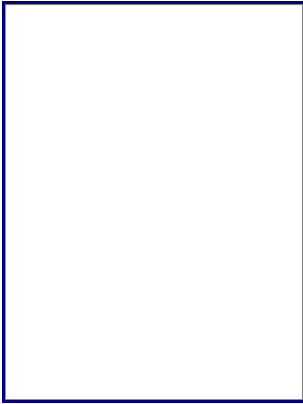


Photo credit: [Muffin Tin Mom- Michelle @ Her Cup Overfloweth](#)

[Advent Wreath](#)



Photo credit: [TheMadHouse](#)

Outdoor play

Make a promise to increase your **outdoor play quota** for the week. Whatever the weather- play outdoors. (Whether the weather be hot, whether the weather be cold, whether the weather whatever the weather, whether you like it or not!)

[Small Fry's Outdoor play book](#) is jam packed full of brilliant starters and activities (more on this soon) [See a sample page.](#)

Find amazing play outdoor things to do at

[The Grass Stain Guru](#)

[Salisbury Downs](#)

[Activekidsclub](#)

[TheGreenhour.](#)

Start a [nature club](#) with this toolkit like [Naturestrollers](#)



Photo credit: [Children and nature.](#)

[Discovertheforest.org](#)

[Fun Orange County parks](#)- lots of ideas and articles for everyone and locally.

[KaBoom](#)- a great place to play within walking distance of every child in America.

[Loving Natures Garden](#)- family, nature, garden and food

[Outdoor toys](#) from Play Outdoors

[Buy an annual pass](#) to your local state park most on sale Jan 1.

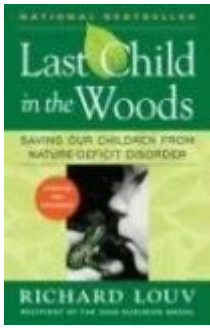
[Little humbugs](#) – the magic of nature

[Nature Rocks](#)- National program bursting with information to inspire and empower families to play and explore in nature.

Nature walks, treasure hunts, [natural play](#), listening walks, [playgrounds](#), playgroups.....there are so many things that can find you outside.

Follow the [#playoutdoors](#) movement on Twitter.

If you are looking for some reading to learn more about playing outdoors try Richard Louv's



[Buy it AMAZON](#)

Toys

We like toys and games like everyone else. For a good list of toys (opens in a pdf) to avoid that will stifle creativity look at [TRUCE](#).

[TRUCE](#) have a large variety of resources available in PDF.

Try [Infant and toddler play](#), [Toys and Media action guide](#). (PDF)

Now you have your mind set for the type of toys you want to bring in the house. You have space after the sorting and giving away. Now, where can you find them?

Shops to consider online that engage child's mind



As you peruse Fat Brain Toys, you may find something missing. In fact, if you're accustomed to the toy selection found at most stores, you may find lots of items missing. Missing are the licensed, violent, cheaply made toys that end up in the trash can shortly after being played with by your child. But what you will find instead are THOUSANDS of quality, open-ended toys, games, and gifts that entertain AND educate.



Our philosophy has remained the same over the years—to make each and every customer a happy and permanent member of the Melissa & Doug family, while offering products with tremendous value, quality and design.



We're proud to be the nation's best resource for toys that engage and entertain. Whatever you select, we guarantee that your children will learn—and have fun—while they play!

[Qubits](#)

The Construction / Educational Toy Designed for Kids who like to Build

You'll love this fun [video](#)

[Leaps and bounds](#)

Encourage your child's development with Leaps and Bounds terrific toys, educational tools, and activities.

[Indoor toys](#)

[Outdoor toys](#)



[Barefoot books](#)

Welcome to a place...where there's always time for make believe. Where whimsical can be wise and learning can be fun. Where stories have the power to inspire children to explore, create, and connect to the wonders of the world around them. A world where everyone lives Barefoot.

[Imaginechildhood](#)



At imaginechildhood.com we believe that children should experience the world through their own eyes, ears, fingers, and toes. That direct interaction with nature is the best way to learn about the world, and that open-ended imaginative play is the best way to learn about what it could be.

Part community forum, part storefront, imaginechildhood.com is a place where parents and kids can find their own definition of childhood.

On our blog and in our store we offer stories, activities, and innovative products that encourage exploration, creativity, and open-ended unstructured play.

Naturalpod

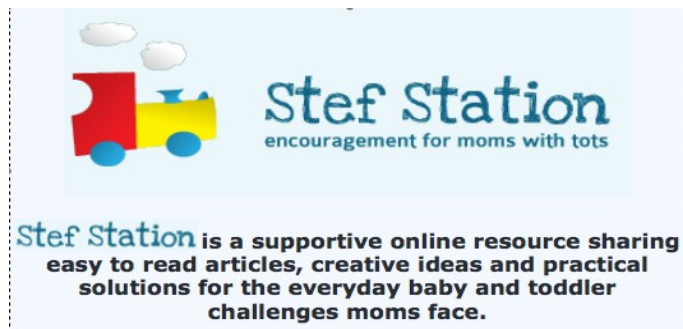
Natural Pod began out of our own desire to have beautiful, open-ended, natural toys for our children and a way to discover what is new and interesting in the world. And, of course, we derive some joy from finding just the right gift for someone, or for ourselves

As parents we found it increasingly difficult to find quality natural play items that supported creative and imaginative play. During our search, we soon realized that many parents shared our passion. We hope to encourage more families to discover the benefits of natural toys and rediscover a true sense of play. These items can become an heirloom, passed down from one generation to the next.

Etsy for [wooden toys](#) and unique toys



Photo credit: [Childrens Country scene](#) Photo credit: [Babypop](#) Photo credit: [gigglejunction](#)



[Imagination stories](#).....Finally, a fun, wholesome and easy way to engage and develop the imaginations of children between 2 and 5 years of age!

[Finger Rhymes](#).....Have a few rhymes up your sleeve for those unavoidable "stuck" moments, whether you're trapped in a line up, sitting in the car in a traffic jam or waiting for service at your local

restaurant. These 6 simple finger rhymes can be played anywhere!

- Think about checking out your small toy stores in your local town. You'll have them It's amazing the variety of toys you'll see compared to the big box shops.
- Each of these toy stores have newsletters you can sign up to receive discount codes, new product notices and play advice.

