



# Simple Toy Adaptations

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**Many off-the-shelf toys** work well with children who have disabilities, but some can be made more accessible to children by making small modifications and adaptations. There are ways to adapt toys by developing new play materials, altering a traditional toy, changing game rules' and setting up situations to promote play opportunity. Adaptations do not need to be expensive or high tech in order to work well. There are many simple adaptations that make a world of difference for the children who utilize them.

## ***Adaptations can...***

- allow for discovery.
- increase a child's opportunity to be successful.
- enable a child to become a full, active participant.
- address the individual needs of a child.
- promote and facilitate enjoyment, personal power and control.
- gives a child a level of control of his/her surroundings.

Adaptations can enhance the quality of a child's life by developing self confidence and the will and desire to continue and strive for new heights. With the aid of adaptation, we, as play partners, can be less directive. We can observe and provide an opportunity for a more equal partnership by supporting and encouraging their initiations. By adapting toys, we are not lessening the challenge for the child, but rather allowing that child access to the toy. When adaptations are necessary, first think about the following list and then create the best possible adaptations for that particular child. Remember, play is as unique as each child so adaptations need to be individualized as well.

## ***Think about...***

- What abilities does the child possess?
- What has the child shown interest in playing with?
- What skills does she or he have?
- What skills are they working on in therapy?
- How is the child able to physically manipulate objects?
- What is his/her own frustration level?
- What do you want to encourage?
- What is the ideal play environment for the child?

Now take a minute to think about the toys you own and how you might adapt them for this child. Promote play opportunities and success with these adaptations and enhance a child's drive to succeed, achieve and progress. Below are several categories of adaptations to help you adapt toys.

**NOTE:** Please take care when adapting toys. Adapted toys should only be used with appropriate adult supervision.



### **Stabilize: Steady play materials by attaching them to a surface.**

- Use a C-clamp to attach a puzzle or playhouse to a table or wheelchair tray.
- Put one side of a Velcro strip on the floor of a playhouse (as a carpet) and the other side on the bottom of plastic people and furniture.
- Screw suction cups onto the bottom of toys.
- Place self-adhesive Velcro on each square of a board game and on the bottom of the play pieces.
- Use anti-skid rug material, Rubbermaid shelf liner, or Dycem under the toy to prevent sliding.

#### *Things to look for in store bought toys:*

Toys that have suction cup bottoms.

Toys that snap or stick together (Lego blocks, Bristle Blocks, Magnet Blocks).

Toys that have a wide, short base.

### **Enlarge: Make items bigger so they are easier to see. Make parts of toys bigger so they are easier to grasp and handle.**

- Screw dowel rods onto puzzle pieces for a larger handle.
- Screw a rectangular piece of wood onto a crank knob.
- Use fish tank plastic tubing instead of shoelaces for lacing.
- Attach foam hair curlers to handles (xylophone sticks, crayons).
- Make color copy enlargements of lotto games or memory game pieces.

#### *Things to look for in store bought toys:*

Large knobs on puzzles

Large push activators

Large handles on craft items (stampers, paint brushes)

Large, wide keys on keyboards

Large on/off switches

### **Reduce Required Response: Minimize distance, range of motion and complexity of response.**

- Use a tray or cookie sheet with a lip to keep cars within a child's reach.
- Use a plate switch rather than an on/off switch.

#### *Things to look for in store bought toys:*

Velcro on gloves or mitts with a cloth ball (less grasp needed).

Simple one button remote control cars.

### **Make More Familiar/Concrete: Reduce abstract quality and relate the play to what the child knows.**

- Select toys that the child already knows and understands.
- Demonstrate the toy so the child understands how it works and what is expected.
- Use words to describe the toy and the action.
- Add cues (physical prompts, hand over hand assistance, verbal help) that show how the toy works.



*Things to look for in store bought toys:*

- Common objects, such as a school bus, kitchen set, tool box, baby and cradle.
- Puppets that are real people (a firefighter puppet) rather than unknown objects (nondescript monster).
- Books that have a common subject.

**Remove Unnecessary Features: Consider the goal and take out unrelated elements.**

- For shape recognition activities, have objects that are all the same color.
- Introduce only one concept at a time (e.g. colors, numbers, shapes).

*Things to look for in store bought toys:*

- Toys with only one activity.
- Toys that do not overwhelm with too many steps to do or buttons to press.
- Toys that teach only one concept (e.g. colors, numbers or shapes).

**Remove Distractions: Simplify backgrounds.**

- Place a light-colored toy on a dark cloth or towel and a dark-colored toy on a light cloth or towel to highlight the toy and assist the child in focusing.
- Paint a puzzle board a solid color to highlight the individual puzzle pieces.
- Select a play space that is appropriate (turn the TV and radio off, have good lighting, choose a simple room with little clutter).

*Things to look for in store bought toys:*

- Simple toys with simple pictures.
- Puzzles without busy backgrounds.
- Beginner books with only one large object picture on each page.

**Add or Enhance Cues: Increase the amount of things to see and feel.**

- Use bright contrasting colors.
- Glue textured fabrics to puzzle pieces.
- Add bells or music-playing disks to toys.

*Things to look for in store bought toys:*

- Toys that have lights and music and texture.
- Books that have a sound pad to press.
- Puzzles or blocks with textures.
- Toys that rattle, buzz or ring.
- Stuffed animals that have many different textures.

**Improve Safety or Durability: Avoid sharp objects and protect objects from sticky fingers and drool.**

- Laminate any paper items (game cards, lotto pieces, books).
- Replace nails with screws.
- Pad corners.
- Make pull cords less than 10 inches long.

*Things to look for in store bought toys*

- Thick board books.
- Games with plastic playing pieces (rather than cardboard).
- Toys that can be mouthed or chewed.



Toys with large pieces (if child mouths objects).

### **Sustained Action: Toys that continue to play or move after the child initially activates it.**

- Use switches for battery-operated toys that allow a child to press it once to turn it on and then press a second time to turn it off.

#### *Things to look for in store bought toys*

Toys that have continued movement.

Keyboards that have one button to press to hear an entire song.

Levers or pull cords that activate movement, music or talking toys.

### **Special Hints**

**Doll houses:** Glue or Velcro down the furniture pieces so a child can maneuver the people without mistakenly "redecorating" the house. This is also a nice way to have a travel toy because the pieces won't fall out.

**Pull toys:** Use masking tape to make a maze on the floor to follow.

**Board games:** Fold the board in half and play the game using only half the board. Children, who may have a short attention span, can gain a sense of accomplishment by completing a game.

**Puppets:** Cut a hole in the back of the puppets mouth to feed the puppets. Make a puppet show over the back of the couch.

**Non-skid:** Special rug material or non-skid shelf liner can be used for keeping toys steady on a flat surface.

**Velcro:** Attach strips of both halves of Velcro onto building blocks to make them stick together and easier to build than conventional blocks. Use Velcro to make wrist and ankle bands on children and then attach small toys to the bands. Attach Velcro to the palm of a glove or mitten for easier grasping.

**Shape sorters:** Adapt shape sorter boxes by changing the lids or use plastic containers or coffee cans, changing the lids to make it easier to fit shapes into the holes (or use without a lid for simple in/out activities).

**Slide viewer:** Use a plastic slide viewer with a light underneath to help highlight shapes, figures, etc. for a child who is visually impaired.

**Easels:** Provide small easels for children with poor upper body strength. Attach drawing paper or games with sticky poster putty, two-sided tape or drafting tape (it won't rip your paper). Place silly putty or finger paint in a plastic bag for a child who is tactilely sensitive or who places toys in his/her mouth.

**Lotto:** Enlarge lotto pieces on a copy machine, glue to a firm backing and laminate. Screw in small spools or blocks to puzzles and toys that are hard to pick up. Glue felt onto the bottoms of toys to keep them from slipping. Use a felt board or tray to help a child focus by limiting the space with visual boundaries. Laminate cardboard game pieces to



make them easier to handle and to clean. Small toys can be screwed to blocks of wood to give them a larger base. Change small knobs and levers to larger blocks of wood.

**Books:** Make simple tactile books from felt and scraps of fabrics.

**Handles:** Wind masking tape or use foam hair curlers on the handles of spoons, pencils, crayons, wands, etc. to make handling easier. Punch a pencil or paint brush through a Styrofoam ball to make it easier to hold.

### Source Ideas for Adaptation Materials

<b>Appliance shop:</b>	Large packing cases for playhouses
<b>Building contractor:</b>	Scrap materials, wire, tile, boards, building blocks
<b>Cleaners:</b>	Shirt cardboard, wire hangers
<b>Fabric shop:</b>	Small pieces of fabric, ribbon and tape, loose buttons, zippers
<b>Gas station:</b>	Tires for swings, steering wheels for play cars, large tires for sandboxes
<b>Grocery store:</b>	Boxes of all sizes, Styrofoam trays, wooden crates
<b>Ice cream store:</b>	Picture posters, sturdy containers for storage, personal; "cubbies"
<b>Leather shop:</b>	Leather scraps
<b>Local factory:</b>	Wire, Styrofoam, foam rubber pads, spools, cones
<b>Lumber shop:</b>	Wood scraps, sawdust
<b>Newspaper office:</b>	Newsprint rolls, advertising booklets for pictures to cut out
<b>Office:</b>	Used computer paper for artwork
<b>Paint shop:</b>	Sample color cards, paint buckets, stirrers, old paintbrushes
<b>Post office:</b>	Newsprint scraps, posters
<b>Plumber:</b>	Rubber or plastic tubing
<b>Retail store:</b>	Discarded seasonal decorations
<b>Shoe store:</b>	Boxes, old shoes for dress up
<b>Wallpaper store:</b>	Wallpaper sample books

### Activity Materials from Throwaways

<b>Mismatched plastic bowls:</b>	Nesting toys
<b>Milk bottle tops:</b>	Game counters, play coins
<b>Small soap chips and bars:</b>	Floats, smelling games, bubble and water play
<b>Plastic lids:</b>	Key chains, bracelets
<b>String and yarn:</b>	Sewing games, collages
<b>Cotton socks:</b>	Bean bags, puppets
<b>Beans and seeds:</b>	Growing experiments, bean bags, collages, tactile table
<b>Unmatched gloves and mittens:</b>	Puppets, dress up
<b>Scarves:</b>	Dress up, dancing props
<b>Make up:</b>	Circus play
<b>Cardboard rolls:</b>	Telescopes, talking tubes, little car tunnels
<b>Playing cards:</b>	Counting and matching games
<b>Plastic milk jugs:</b>	Rattle toys, sand scoops, in/out play



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## Simple Toy Adaptations...(continued)

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### Resource/Reference Materials

Alan Berger & Kathy Bollbach, *Adaptive Switch Technology: Birth to Five Years*. Steppingstone Day School, Inc., 77-40 Vleyn Place, Kew Garden Hills, NY 11367.

Linda J. Burkhart, *Homemade Battery Powered toys and Educational Devices for the Severely Handicapped Children, and More Homemade Battery Devices for Severely Handicapped Children With Suggested Activities*. Special Needs Project, 1482 East Valley Road #A- 121, Santa Barbara, CA 93108, (800)333-6867.

Carol Goossens & Sharon Sapp Crain, *Utilizing Switch Interfaces with Children Who Are Severely Physically Challenged*, Pro-Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin, TX 78758.

Jackie Levin & Kathy Enselein, *Fun for Everyone*, AbleNet, Inc., 1081 Tenth Avenue S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414-1312, (800)322-0956.

Alice Wershing, *Fun Stuff Section Exceptional Parent Magazine*, Psy-Ed Corporation, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. EP, Denville, NJ 07834, (800)562-1973.

*Lekotek Plan Book of Adaptive Toys - Volumes I, II, & III*, National Lekotek Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201 (800)366-PLAY.

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