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### **Regional Center of Orange County Shares Holiday Tips: Shopping for Kids with Special Needs**

Santa Ana, CA (Nov., 2023) – Holiday shopping will soon get into full swing, so the experts at [Regional Center of Orange County](#) have come up with quick tips to help friends and family members of children with developmental disabilities select the right toys for each child.

- **Consider Developmental Age, Not Chronological Age.** Many children with special needs have a cognitive disability, so the age range listed on a particular toy may not be suitable for them. A parent or other caregiver will know the child's developmental age. However, remember that, while some toddler-age toys may be developmentally-appropriate, they could present a barrier to social interaction for older children.
- **Consider Sensory Preferences.** In general, it's good to look for toys that engage a child's senses, such as touch, sound and sight. But remember that loud sounds and bright or flashing lights that delight one child can be distressing for another. Similarly, certain textures and scents can be comforting to some children but unpleasant to others. The child's parents are the best source for identifying sensitivities and sensory preferences that can affect your gift selections.
- **Take Into Account Physical Challenges.** Like typical children, those with special needs can benefit from toys that encourage them to use their fingers and hands in ways that build fine motor control. This can include building blocks, as well as arts and crafts, even simple musical instruments (like kazoos, drums or xylophones). For a child who uses a wheelchair, consider whether the toy will be accessible from the chair or will it require assistance.
- **Build Social Skills.** While independent play is important, many children with developmental disabilities, especially autism, struggle to develop social relationships. Toys that promote social interaction, such as board and card games, can help children engage with others and practice communication skills.
- **Consult the Child's Therapist.** Some toys and games can foster important physical, cognitive, social and behavioral/emotional development. The therapists working with the child can be a great resource for toys and gift ideas that use play to nurture developmental progress.

- **Ask the Parents.** Children with developmental disabilities can be at greater risk for injury, so standard advice about toy safety – such as avoiding high-powered magnets, tiny batteries and other small parts -- may not be sufficient. When in doubt, ask the child’s parents if a particular toy is appropriate.

For more tips and information, check out the [Toys and Play](#) page on RCOC’s website, which features links to more than a dozen websites, articles and other resources devoted to helping parents and caregivers select toys and games that are appropriate for children with various developmental disabilities, including those intended to foster developmental progress.

**About RCOC:** Regional Center of Orange County is the private, nonprofit organization contracted by the State of California to coordinate lifelong services and supports for more than 25,000 Orange County residents with developmental disabilities and their families. The Regional Center is the first stop for those seeking to obtain local services and supports to help them live safely and with dignity in the community. Developmental disabilities include intellectual disabilities, autism, epilepsy and cerebral palsy. Learn more at [www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com).

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