

A LIBRARY RESOURCE GUIDE FOR TOYS

INTRODUCTION

What is a toy collection?

Many libraries include toys within the scope of the materials that they make available to their various user bases. There is also a growing number of toy libraries that deal exclusively with these unique materials around the world. Depending on the library's policies, goals, budget, and the community it seeks to serve, the definition of "toys" and those that it collects and makes available may vary significantly. A prevalent purpose is providing practical methods of developmental learning for young children in addition to making accessible expensive recreational toys to families that might not otherwise be able to afford them. While "toys" can encompass a staggeringly wide array of materials including popular entertainment for adults, such as miniatures, radio control models, and other such valuable collectibles, and playthings for pets, this guide will focus primarily on the aforementioned developmental tools as family resources for young children. This includes manipulatives, games, and other props and tools for play that accommodate a wide range of disciplines (such as science, health, and art), learning styles (such as visual, memory, and construction), and senses (such as a touch, hearing, and sight). It provides parents and guardians of young children to benefit from often expensive toys that children quickly grow out of or are otherwise too costly to consider purchasing, particularly for lower-income families.

Audience/users

Common audiences for toy libraries and collections include age groups such as preschool, 1 to 12 years, and all ages, gender-equal, and children with disabilities. It should be determined whether or not age restrictions will be applied to certain materials, keeping in mind region-specific regulations such as the Government of Canada's Toys Regulations.¹ Users are generally parents and guardians of young children who borrow on behalf of these intended audiences. Other common users might include groups, such as preschool, elementary school, and other childcare organizations – it should be kept in mind that larger groups will have need for greater numbers of toys, which may or may not be feasible based on the size of the collection.

TOY SELECTION

Quality

Just as with choosing quality binding for the mass use of traditional print library materials, such as library or archival bound editions, it is important to consider quality in the craftsmanship and materials employed in producing toys. Although higher quality in toys will generally imply greater cost, it also contributes to the longevity of the products. Investing in well-reviewed brands is a good step in ensuring quality products. Try to select manufacturers that supply replacement parts separately for future maintenance purposes to ensure maximum life of toys. Additionally, purchasing from local retailers will allow physical handling of toys prior to purchase, allowing for quality assurance first-hand. Toys that meet safety standards and are made of durable and easily-cleaned materials will last the longest and be the easiest to maintain. When in doubt, consult with or observe the practices of fellow toy-circulating libraries.

User needs/accessibility

To optimize the collection, when possible, select toys that can both be used to develop multiple skills and be used in many ways by various user groups. It is also important that the selection of toys reflects the values of your library – a public library toy collection should promote multiculturalism, sexual equality, non-violence, healthy and accepting worldviews, and should consider equality of access for children with disabilities. Depending on budgetary restrictions, as well as intended audience, it might be prudent to develop a significant portion of the collection

¹ Government of Canada. "Toys Regulations (SOR/2011-17)." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2011-17/>.

based on expensive or over-sized toys that families would be less likely to purchase themselves, therefore facilitating greater popularity and circulation. This will all depend on your library's user community and their specific needs – consider surveying the community to determine what will work best for your library and users. Ensure consideration of not only the needs of parents and their educational goals, but appeal factors for the child users themselves.

Appropriateness

Toys that are difficult to clean and maintain and/or are potential carriers of pests such as lice and bedbugs should be avoided, such as those composed of textile or otherwise porous or absorptive materials. Toys that are based on popular media such as television programming should be avoided as their popularity is relative and materials are reportedly generally of a lower quality while demanding a higher cost.

Safety

While adhering to any applicable regulations, such as the aforementioned Government of Canada's Toys Regulations, there are a number of basic qualities and components that should be avoided in the selection of any toys, among which are: string or rope longer than a foot (strangling), sharp edges/corners, small and loose/removable pieces, toxic materials (such as lead in paint, arsenic, cadmium, and PVC), and breakable plastic. To ensure safety of users, stayed tuned to current toy safety information such as advisories, warnings, and recalls made available by organizations such as Health Canada's Consumer Health Safety documents and resources.² Always consider toy insurance in terms of protecting the value of the collection in case of disaster as well as to prevent liability in the case of harm to users.

TOY ACQUISITION

Finding suppliers

Locating the best toy suppliers for your library or collection needs can be a daunting task. There are two significant options that can alleviate the difficulty – choosing well-reviewed toy manufacturers and distributors of their products in order to obtain maximum quality and finding dependable local suppliers that can offer increased service and rates. Negotiating business with local retailers can provide many benefits among which are negated or decreased shipping costs, accessibility for servicing, repairs, and spare parts, as well as obtaining greater discounts and offers by developing a closer, in-person rapport. In order to maximize your collection budget, watch suppliers' websites, mailing lists, and advertisements for sales, particularly during seasonal sale periods such as Black Friday, Christmas, and Boxing Day. Similarly, consider more cost-effective options such as educational vendors, outlet suppliers, and direct-from-manufacturer ordering. Always remember to factor in additional fees such as shipping, taxes, and duties, and ask for library discounts when possible.

Donations/buying used

Toys made of durable materials will last a long time, and can therefore often be purchased second-hand (or accepted as donations) if in good condition and cleanable. Try second-hand and thrift stores, even, potentially, garage sales, library-policy-willing. Watch internet classifieds such as Kijiji, Craig's List, and eBay, and consider posting want ads if necessary or desired. Consider asking board and staff members as well as users to donate toys, particularly upon initial collection development in order to quickly and affordably amass a considerable selection of materials. If donations are inappropriate, depending on library policy, either reject, dispose of, or pass on to another relevant organization -- see "Appropriateness." If buying used, ensure that receipts are obtained for record keeping and insurance purposes.

² Health Canada. "Consumer Product Safety: Toys and Related Products." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/child-enfant/toys-jouets/index-eng.php>.

Vendors/distributors/manufacturers

While not nearly comprehensive, the following list provides examples of prominent North American toy vendors that might be further consulted in determining the applicability of their services and products for use with your library.

American Library Association. "Vendor List." Accessed May 20, 2013.

http://www.ala.org/offices/sites/ala.org.offices/files/content/publishing/editions/webextras/Bolan09690/app_d_vendor_list.pdf.

The ALA's listing of vendors by category, including relevant suppliers such as IncredibleGifts.com, Raymond Geddes and Company, Inc., and U.S. Toy Company.

Autism Speaks. "Toys & Games." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/toys-games>.

Autism Speaks' listing of vendors and services that specifically stock toys and tools intended for autistic children, such as SpecialNeedsToys.com, Aven's Corner, and Autism Treasure Chest.

The Collectors Guild. "Family Playroom." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.familyplayroom.com/>.

Family Playroom aims to provide "fun, innovative, and responsible toys" via major categories such as wooden toys, educational toys, baby toys, imagination, and kitchen.

Discovery Toys. "Discovery Toys: Teach. Play. Inspire." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.discoverytoys.com/>.

Discovery Toys focuses on early childhood education, producing toys, books, games, and music for specific age groups that are designed to combine "multiple levels of learning in every toy."

Fun and Function. "Fun and Function: Where Kids of All Abilities Learn Through Play!" Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://funandfunction.com/>.

Run by pediatric occupational therapist, Aviva Weiss, Fun and Function aims to "normalize" differences of special needs children, helping them achieve their fullest potential.

LearningToys.ca. "LearningToys.ca." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.learningtoys.ca/>.

Learning Toys stocks a number of brand name toys in a number of categories such as early learning, imaginative, science, creative and building, outdoor, and games and puzzles.

Mastermind Toys. "Mastermind Toys." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.mastermindtoys.com/>.

Mastermind Toys, "Canada's Premier Specialty Toy Retailer," seeks to encourage curiosity and challenge thinking through toys such as brain puzzles, construction, dress-up, and puppets.

Scholar's Choice. "Educational Toys." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://toys.scholarschoice.ca/>.

Scholar's Choice is a school supplies vendor that offers toys in categories such as active play, art and music, pretend play, puzzles and games, science and nature, and transportation.

COLLECTION MAINTENANCE

Storage/cataloguing

Depending on available space, there are many ways to store and display your toy collection. One decision that should be made initially is whether the collection will be available in open storage for patrons to browse, or whether it will be kept in a secure location with a photographic catalogue made available for browsing. A photo catalogue (physical as well as online) should be considered for convenient browsing by patrons regardless of storage/display. Different types of storage are more suitable for different types of toys. For example, puzzles and games are well-suited to traditional shelving; however, uniquely-shaped toys might be better stored in lidded plastic containers, boxes, or specially-designed shelving or racks (such as lockable toy cabinets on wheels); large, heavy toys such as play kitchen sets and riding toys would be best suited to designated floor space storage. Toys can be stored and organized in various ways such as by category, size, or materials.

Circulation

It should be determined in what capacity materials will circulate. Can all be checked out and brought home? Will designated play areas be provided within the library's spaces? Will there be certain limitations to which materials can circulate and which will remain within the library space? Borrowing limits should be considered if applicable, either by user, family, household, or group, in addition to toy categories, for example one large/expensive toy per household, or four smaller standard toys per user. A photo catalogue of toys in the collection should include pictures of all components, which should be checked by staff upon returns to ensure multiple parts remain together.

Fines

Late fees and policies concerning damages and toy replacement should be established on either a general basis, or based on each individual toy's value. Grace periods and/or returns can provide flexibility for busy family life. Donations can also be considered in place of replacement or repair fines, given safety and health standards. If a toy is returned in a state of significantly lower repair than at the time of circulation, and damage due to inappropriate use or external factors (such as heat or water damage, as well as that caused by pets) was clearly a contributing factor, fines in the previously suggested capacities should be enforced. This information should be included in the library's policy that patrons acknowledge upon providing a signature for library membership. Fines should be hefty enough as to discourage stealing, yet forgiving enough to accommodate the lifestyles of lower-income families.

Cleaning

Toys should ideally be cleaned upon each return, however this is not always feasible due to budgetary and staff limitations. At bare minimum, cleaning supplies should be available at the circulation desk for quick wipe-downs and minor cleaning upon return of a toy. Toxic chemicals should not be used for cleaning as children have a tendency to taste their surroundings. Toys should be cleaned regularly and should not re-circulate if dirty – special care should be given to components such as handles and parts that are likely to attract the most physical contact. It should be suggested to patrons that toys be returned in good, clean condition.

Repairs

Major repairs should be outsourced. Depending on warranty and rates, options include the manufacturer (most cost-effective and convenient with local vendors) or a toy repair shop, which can be particularly useful if the toy's warranty has expired. All repairs should be documented and receipts filed. Safety should also be retested according to applicable regulations. It is also important to keep in mind that often replacement is a more economical option than repair.

Weeding

Old and/or unused toys can be weeded as the collection grows and storage space becomes scarce. Damaged toys, if beyond repair, should also be weeded and disposed of if unsafe. If weeded toys are still in good condition, they can either be sold or donated within the community. Any toys that are sold or donated should be cleaned thoroughly and necessary repairs made.

Further information

Canadian Toy Testing Council. "Canadian Toy Testing Council: Learning through play since 1952." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://toy-testing.org/>.

Government of Canada. "Hazardous Products (Toys) Regulations." Accessed May 20, 2013. http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._931/index.html.

Health Canada. "Consumer Product Safety: Industry Guide to Health Canada's Safety Requirements for Children's Toys and Related Products, 2012." Accessed May 20, 2013. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/indust/toys-jouets/index-eng.php>.