

Toys for Girls and Boys



*Toys are vital to your child's development. The National Toy Council has prepared a series of leaflets **Toys & Children** to help parents to understand better issues relating to toys. This newly revised leaflet is designed to help in the selection of toys for girls and boys.*



Why do boys and girls play differently

and often prefer different toys? Someone said that if you gave footballs to 100 girls and dolls to 100 boys, within an hour the boys would be kicking the dolls and the girls would be nursing the footballs. Research shows that gender differences begin in early childhood.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN PLAY

Boys are usually more physically active than girls so boys prefer active, noisy play, and girls choose more social and passive forms of play. Boys are attracted by action and sound effects and making things happen, as in computer games. There is overlap, of course, with boys and girls sharing many play interests and activities – puppets, drawing, games, puzzles, wind-up animals, and modelling clay, to name a few.

Although boys and girls play differently they are alike in basic ways. Both need variety in their play – playing alone, playing with others, playing quietly and playing actively. No single toy, or type of toy, can satisfy all a child's play needs. It is important for all children to experience a wide variety of play, and to be offered a range of toys and play opportunities.

TOY PREFERENCES

Differences in the toy choices of boys and girls appear from as young as 9 months of age. Many boys prefer male super-hero dolls and vehicles, while girls prefer baby dolls and toy household objects.

Girls are more flexible — they play happily with soft, cuddly toys, as well as with action figures, chemistry sets, and video games. Boys are quicker to reject a toy that they consider a 'girl's' toy.

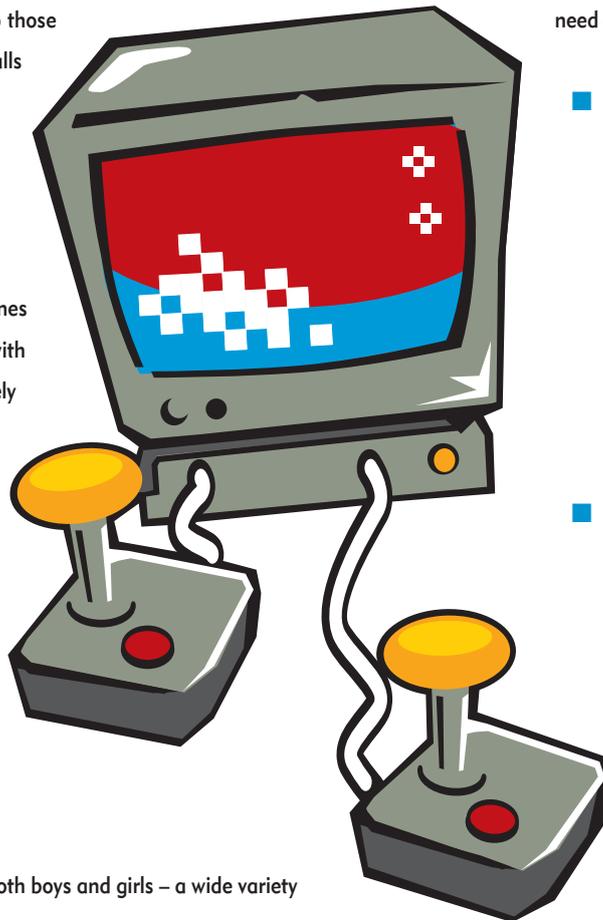
WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT?

Why do boys and girls play differently? There are two basic explanations. The usual explanation is social: that sex differences are learned as part of gender socialisation (learning the roles of males and females). Children are influenced by the adults, and later by the other children, around them. From babyhood, adults give cars and other 'boys toys' to boys and dolls to girls, thus teaching them which toys are 'appropriate' for them. Later these sex differences are further strengthened by the child's friends and classmates. Toy manufacturers often package and advertise toys 'for boys' or 'for girls'. So a pink toy chest with a Barbie doll design is seen as a girl's toy.



The alternative explanation is biological. Recent research increasingly supports this. Even monkeys show sex differences in toy preferences similar to those in children — young males preferred balls and cars, while young females preferred dolls and a pot. The young monkeys played equally with 'neutral' toys, a picture book and a stuffed dog.

Other biological factors like hormones are also important. In one study, girls with high levels of androgens were more likely than other girls to prefer 'masculine' toys. Males and females evolved with different styles of visual perception and colour sensitivity. This may explain why boys and girls prefer different different colours and why boys' prefer active toys.



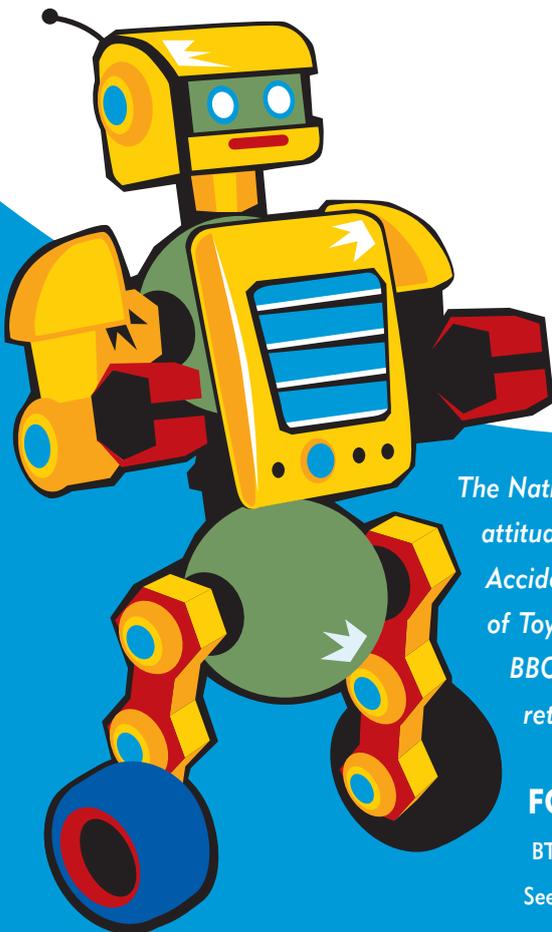
■ Toy buyers should not limit themselves by thinking that a particular toy is only for a boy or only for a girl. Children need a variety of play experiences to develop fully.

■ Don't worry about allowing boys to play with dolls or domestic toys; there is no evidence that toys influence a boy's masculinity or result in feminine traits. Children use their imaginations with toys, any way, so you may find boys slinging dolls at each other, while girls use action men to go on dates with Barbie.

■ To encourage boys and girls to play together, combine neutral toys such as teddies, toys for baking, games, mats for dancing, etc, with traditional boys' and girls' toys in play areas.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

■ It is important to offer children – both boys and girls – a wide variety of toys and opportunities for play.



The National Toy Council is concerned with child welfare and promoting a sensible attitude towards toys and play. Its members include representatives of the Child Accident Prevention Trust, British Toy & Hobby Association, National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries, The Trading Standards Institute, BBC Children's Television, Kidscape, national press, academics, retailers and toy safety experts.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

BTHA, 80 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0EG

See all of the National Toy Council's leaflets on the internet at www.btha.co.uk

