



ASTRA

Newsletter

Ready, Set, PLAY...for Children with Disabilities

BUY FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

by Diana Nielander, National Lekotek Center

As you prepare your strategy to shop Toy Fair, don't forget to look for products that are especially great for children with disabilities. Here are some helpful hints for planning and embarking on that mission.

Pre-shop

We often get calls from retailers who ask us to help them select toys that are good for children with disabilities. Now that AblePlay.org is up and running (a special project of the National Lekotek Center), we suggest that you use the website as a "smart" buying guide. It is easy to log on and search products by the manufacturer's name.

Within each comprehensive AblePlay Product Review, you will be able to see the benefits of the product for children with disabilities. Formulate your pre-shopping list of "must-sees" and take it with you to the fair. Even better, print off each Product Review for your staff if you do decide to purchase any of the items. Just reading a few reviews will give them some new insight into the toys and their therapeutic value. They will be ready to assist your customers with exceptional knowledge about the product. After all, specialty stores are known for their highly educated staff.

Review important universal features before you go

This year, try to look at products through a different set of eyes and shop "smart." Keep an eye out for specific features that make the toy especially good for children with disabilities. Some of these universal features include:

- **Adjustability** – Can the toy's height, volume or game play be adjusted based on a child's level or ability?
- **Enlarged handles** – Can children use a whole-hand grasp rather than fine motor skills?

- **Stable bases** – Does the toy have suction cups or a non-stick or weighted bottom so it will remain more secure on the play surface?
- **Sustained action** – Can the child activate the toy and have time to refocus and enjoy what he or she has accomplished?
- **Cleanability** – Is the toy washable or does it have laminated or plastic surfaces so that it is easily cleaned?
- **Large openings** – Is there enough space for hands and bodies to maneuver through without toppling or disrupting play for a child with less refined movements?

Ask the manufacturer about product development or consumer feedback

Manufacturers have really begun to consider children with disabilities in their product design and development. Ask them if they used therapists or experts in the development of any specific products. Ask them if they have received feedback on specific products and how they relate to children with disabilities. In my experience, manufacturers have a lot of knowledge to contribute on this topic, but they often don't mention it unless they are asked. (*Hint:* Toy manufacturers! You may want to make sure you display your AblePlay Rating Seal or provide special visuals for those toys that are good for children with disabilities.)

Track your choices

You may want to consider keeping track of items that are good for children with disabilities. This will save you time when you begin your marketing efforts. You will have an at-your-fingertips list of items you can also promote to this lucrative niche market.

It's easier than you think to maintain a well-rounded inventory that includes toys for children with disabilities because they are universally good for ALL children. I will be at Toy Fair, so if you are interested in meeting in-person over dinner or drinks, e-mail me at dnielander@lekotek.org.

Have fun!