

Special Needs Training Tool



DISCOVERY TOYS is committed to bringing fun, safe and developmentally appropriate toys and products to children and adults of all abilities. Children with developmental disabilities, like all children, develop at a unique rate and pattern of development. However, significant delays in development are often accompanied by a diagnosis. Our products have useful applications for children and adults with developmental disabilities, as well as for adults suffering from dementia. Therefore, it is important to consider where and how the individual is functioning now, opposed to their chronological age.

By using our **3 Part Special Needs Training Tool** alongside the ***DT Special Needs Toy Guide*** and the ***DT Autism Toy Guide*** you will be able to confidently and successfully recommend Discovery Toys products to families, caregivers, educators and therapists of children and adults with special needs. The information contained in this tool is very straightforward and easy to digest. We do not expect you to be an authority on the particular circumstances and conditions involved in every case. The family is the expert on the individual. You are the expert on the toys!

Warning: Do not personally adapt a product for an individual with special needs. You could be held liable!

Part 1:

Understanding Developmental Delay vs. Developmental Disability

First, it is important to distinguish between a *Developmental Delay* and a *Developmental Disability*. Developmental Delay is a term used to describe an infant or child who exhibits a delay in meeting developmental milestones and difficulty acquiring new skills. With intervention, many children learn to compensate for these learning difficulties and catch up to their peers. Therefore, a toy or product typically used with a three year old can also be appropriate for a four year old who is working on that same skill. An example is Playful Patterns. This product is geared to teach a typically developing four year old shapes, colors, and patterns. This product can also be recommended for a six year old working on these same concepts.

A child or adult with a *Developmental Disability* present has mental and/or physical impairments that affect the individual's ability to learn skills and complete daily living tasks. Onset is prior to the age of 18 and is considered a life-long impairment. People with developmental disabilities often have a diagnosis. These include but are not limited to autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome. Without improvement over time, some children labeled developmentally delayed will eventually be given a diagnosis.

Part 2:

Choosing a Product for an Individual with a Special Need

Many children and adults receive physical, occupational and speech/ language therapy to address delays in development. These professionals can be a resource for families choosing a product for their loved one. At the same time, you too can be a resource to the families by showcasing the endless benefits of Discovery Toys products.

Typically, we make toy recommendations based on chronological age; however, when selecting a product for an individual with special needs, other questions should be asked. For an individual with special needs it is important to first ask the family member or therapist what types of stimulation the individual enjoys and how he/she learns best. After a discussion about the individual's educational and play needs, you can build a list of recommendations from there.

Simply follow the 3 steps outlined below and you will be able to make an informed toy recommendation.

STEP 1: Find out what learning style the individual prefers

A - Auditory (*Sound*) Individual learns best through listening to spoken word. This individual responds to products that offer sound variations in loudness, pitch, and/or tone.

K - Kinesthetic (*Touch & Movement*) Individual learns best through touch (tactile), movement, and action. This individual takes things apart and puts them back together in order to learn. They enjoy products that offer a variety of textures and sensory experiences.

V - Visual (*Sight*) Individual learns best through sight, body language, and expression. They prefer to observe how something works and/or read printed words for direction.

STEP 2: Ask the parent/caregiver/therapist what skills the individual is working on. Below you will find a list and description of common disabilities. In addition, general goals are included to help you make an informed choice regarding products.

- **Hearing loss:** individuals experience a partial to whole loss of hearing. Product selections are geared toward visual, tactile/kinesthetic, and motor learning styles.
- **Visual disabilities:** individuals experience a partial to whole loss of sight. Product selections are geared toward auditory and tactile/kinesthetic learning styles.
- **Communication skills:** individuals experience delays in auditory comprehension and expressive communication skills. Product selections are geared toward learning language concepts, following directions, and using language to comment or request.
- **Physical limitations:** individuals experience deficits in coordination and balance and/or delays in fine motor and gross motor skills.
- **Social skills:** individual has difficulty relating to others especially peers. Affects turn-taking and making friendships. Toy and games that encourage cooperation are useful.
- **Cognitive skills:** individuals experience delays in memory, concentration and acquisition of age appropriate concepts.

STEP 3: Choose products from the *DT Special Needs Toy Guide* to match the individual's learning style(s) with the desired goals for that type of impairment.

Example A: If a child is a Visual learner and is learning simple vocabulary and action words, the child is working on Communication Skills. The recommendation of Once Upon a Time or Ahoy, Pirate Pete would be appropriate.

Example B: If a child responds to tactile input (Kinesthetic learner) and is working on developing fine motor skills (Physical Limitations), Shapes and Laces could be suggested.

Part 3:

Choosing a Product for an Individual with Autism

Discovery Toys has sensational products that encourage multiple levels of learning for individuals of all abilities. For individuals with autism, the learning opportunities built into Discovery Toys products provide great value and fabulous results. This training tool will help you understand the most commonly shared learning difficulties, and match toys and activities to support learning programs for people with autism.

Individuals with autism tend to experience six areas of significant difficulty. DT toys have been assigned one or more Autism Symbols relative to how they address the area of difficulty an individual with autism might be experiencing. The DT Autism Symbols are as follows:

- a Toys that promote independent play with some limited interaction:** Individuals with autism often have difficulty playing independently. They need toys that initially require instruction from the parent/teacher, but can be completed by the individual by themselves.
- b Toys that promote sustained engagement:** Choose toys that can be played with over and over with a slightly different pattern or result to build up the individual's attention span and ability to focus.
- c Toys that develop cooperative play:** Awareness and necessity to share and communicate is critical for cooperating with peers. Select toys and games that engage multiple players to complete an activity and foster turn-taking.
- d Toys that give children opportunities to talk about their play experiences:** Being able to verbalize the play experience is vital to learning, skill development and academic and social progress. Encourage toys that promote communication and conversation between the individual and others.
- e Toys with obvious completion criteria:** Repetitive behavior is often seen in individuals with Autism and may deprive them of understanding when a task is completed, thus missing out on a sense of accomplishment. Choose toys that can be used with or without a partner in which the individual is aware of his/her own success at the completion of the activity.
- f Toys that promote pretend play:** Some children find pretend play comes naturally, others need to be shown how to "make-believe". Individuals with autism need toys that help them to foster imagination and think abstractly.

To suggest the best products to your customers, please ask which of the 6 areas the individual is working on and then look for the products that have been assigned that symbol on the ***DT Autism Toy Guide***.