



- 1. Forget where it came from.** Great grandma brought it back from her trip to Peru, but it's ugly, and no one ever plays with it. Sound familiar? Try not to get sentimental about where the toy came from, especially if it was a gift. No gift giver is doing so to burden you. If it is not played with, for whatever reason, and no one really loves it...donate it.
- 2. Limit plastic.** I suggest you put all your child's toys into piles of plastic and non-plastic, and then reduce the plastic pile first. Why? Some plastics, such as PVC, can be hazardous to our health. Often plastic is treated with chemicals to give them different properties. These chemicals can cause interruptions to hormones, or in the worst cases can be carcinogenic. Do you want your young child chewing and sucking on potentially dangerous plastics? I know that if I can avoid it, I will. Keep in mind that some non-plastic

The Fears Family: Our adventure in Buying Nothing New in 2013 and beyond.

<http://thefearsfamily.wordpress.com>

toys may also be painted with toxic paints. I'm not suggesting you go overboard with the anxieties, but being aware of what your child's toys are made of and where they come from is a good start.

- 3. Refuse to purchase brand new toys.** If you have ever been into a charity store (I hope you have) you will have seen piles and piles of toys begging for a new home. One of my local stores bags them up in garbage bin sized lots to sell, knowing that selling them individually will take a life time. Many charities will not accept large toys or soft toys anymore because it takes so long to move them. Have you ever noticed how often brightly coloured, cheap, plastic, rubbishy toys adorn hard rubbish heaps? I haven't been to my local tip shop yet, but I can imagine how many plastic toys end up there, or worse, in land fill. I struggle to think of a good reason to purchase first hand toys when there is a world of abandoned second hand toys out there waiting for a new child.
- 4. Only keep what you can fit.** Settle on the type of storage you want for your child's room or your play corner. Don't add to this – ever. If the storage you've chosen over flows it is time to move on some of the toys. The more storage you have the more stuff you have. It's a simple equation.
- 5. One in, one out.** This theory will seem easy at first, but as you pare down to a less daunting amount of toys it will get harder. If you commit to the one in, one out philosophy *really* commit to it. Even at Christmas time or birthdays.
- 6. Put some toys away for special occasions.** I like doing this with Little Fears's cars. She has small collection of her own cars that she plays with often. She was also gifted a larger collection of second hand cars from some of my ex-students. I like to bring these out when her cousins come around as it means all the kids can play cars together and the items become "valuable" to the children as they are not always readily available. When the guests leave, the cars go away again. It reduces every day toy clutter and gives the kids a thrill when they're allowed to play with them.
- 7. Get rid of toys that are not age appropriate.** This rule really only applies to families that don't plan to expand, or families that can easily lend their toys for younger children in bulk to another family. If this is not possible store baby toys outside the house where they won't accidentally come back into the rotation.

- 8. Get rid of doubles.** Being a Sesame Street family we often go through Little Fears's toys to discover that somehow, somewhere she has managed to double up on the number of Cookie Monster's she has. Or, being musically minded, we notice that she now has three drums, but only uses one. This is an easy cull – get rid of those doubles! Look for them all the time. It's almost like they multiply while we're asleep.**
- 9. Reduce “sets” to a manageable amount.** Lots of toys come in sets. There is no good reason why they have to have all the set to play with all the time. If there are six pieces of fruit in the wooden fruit set, put away three. If the tea set is for five, put away three settings until a friend comes over.
- 10. Be creative.** After our first visit to the zoo we made kangaroo and koala puppets using pictures from a magazine and pop sticks. Little Fears loved playing with them for about a week, and when she was done the pop sticks and magazine pictures could be added to the craft box (or recycled if damaged). Little Fears is endlessly curious about koalas at the moment and every time I see a stuffed toy koala I'm tempted to buy it for her, but I know the phase will pass and the puppet is enough to encourage koala inspired role playing.
- 11. Store “like” toys together.** This will help you keep an eye out for doubles as well as recognising when your child has enough of that type of toy. It also means that toys are more likely to be played with and less likely to be forgotten. When Little Fears's cousins wanted to play shop on a recent visit we were easily able to locate all of her wooden and woollen food because it was stored together.
- 12. Battery operated? Gone!** I know that I don't need to explain this. I guess sometimes battery operated toys are fun, but generally they're noisy, annoying, over stimulating and require very little use of the imagination. Battery operated toys are fun killers.
- 13. Be critical.** Spend some time observing how your child plays and get rid of things that don't suit their needs. Sometimes it is (painfully) something you have bought them because you thought they'd love it (and they don't). Sometimes it just doesn't peak their interest. If it is neglected pass it on to someone who will use it.

14. Display toys. Toys that can't be seen or can't be found might as well have already been culled. If you think some toys have great potential but aren't being used display them prominently in your child's play space. Change these every now and again (but not too regularly).

15. Join a toy library. Often toy library's work on a member volunteers basis – for every hour you volunteer you get a certain number of loans for the year. This means toy libraries are not only a great parent resource but also a wonderful way to expand and contribute to your community. Toy libraries, like any other library, are a brilliant way to reduce the number of toys you own. It is also a great way to 'trial' toys you think your children might like. You may use the toy library to borrow out larger toys that you don't want to store when your child has out grown them. One person I know even borrows out a slip'n'slide for hot weekends! Talk about a money and sanity saver.

*Please don't do that, it will probably block your toilet.

** They don't. You are letting them into your home. Always remember that toys don't happen to you, you let them happen.

Further reading:

<http://www.ecolife.com/parenting/natural-toys/safer-plastic-toys.html>

<http://io9.com/how-to-recognize-the-plastics-that-are-hazardous-to-you-461587850>

<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1355864/toxic-plastic-toys-may-pose-health-hazard-young-children-consumer>

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/natural-health/dangerous-plastics-safe-plastics-zmaz09aszraw.aspx>

<http://crunchydomesticgoddess.com/2010/01/19/children-consumerism-toys-and-trash/>

<http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/toys.html>