Over the past decade there has been a great emphasis placed on early brain development. Many parents and caregivers have come to believe that manufactured, technologically sophisticated toys are the key to optimal brain development. In fact, it is how we care for and play with our infants and young children that have the greatest influence on how a child’s brain develops. Secure attachment relationships and interactive play between a child and his/her parents and caregivers are the Keys to ensuring growth of a healthy brain that is wired for childhood and adult achievements.

Indoor and Outdoor environments naturally provide parents and caregivers with countless items that can be transformed into amazing toys. Encouraging the creative use of household items and nature’s resources for interactive play has benefits that reach far beyond cost savings. Interactive play, using items found in a child’s environment has proven positive benefits, while play with electronic toys has not been adequately researched for safety and long term effects on a child’s developing brain.

Growing Great Kids™ provides parents and caregivers with many activities that include suggestions for making common household items and outdoor resources into toys. The primary intention of all these activities is to encourage the interactions between parents, caregivers and young children that result in shared pleasure and learning.

The following are guidelines for making and using homemade toys and determining the safety of manufactured toys.

CONTINUED
Homemade toys included in Growing Great Kids™ materials, are intended to be used by children under the close supervision of an adult and are not intended to be left with an unsupervised child. They are not intended to be used for “mouthing or chewing”. Their primary purpose is for interactive play.

Homemade toys have a short “lifespan” and should be DISCARDED IMMEDIATELY when they begin to fray, crack, or just generally “fall apart”.

Because so many things can be dangerous for babies and young children, ALWAYS CLOSELY SUPERVISE children’s exploration and play.

When considering items to use, first think about all of the THINGS the CHILD MIGHT DO WITH THE TOY such as:

- Putting it in his mouth
- Hitting
- Pulling it apart
- Swallowing it
- Putting it in her nose or ears
- Covering his mouth or nose
- Cutting off circulation (string, yarn or cord longer than a few inches can cut off circulation to fingers, toes, or airways)

When making toys for children, SAFETY must always be a priority.

When using craft supplies to make toys, such as duct tape, use only products Made in the US or CANADA.

- The label should: include “ASTM-D4236”, certifying it has been manufactured in the United States, the manufacturing process has been reviewed by a toxicologist, and the product is safe.
- Canadian products need to carry an equivalent (similar) certification.

CONTINUED
When making a toy, **CHECK FOR and AVOID** the following:

- Objects that can fit through a toilet paper roll unless they are enclosed in a childproof container
- Sharp edges
- Toxic paints, glues and markers
- Things that can poke or pierce a child’s eye or skin
- Plastic bags or balloons
- String or yarn
- Buttons
- Anything a child could swallow, or get stuck in the child’s nose, ears or airway.

When making a toy, pay attention to the **SAFETY of the MATERIALS** you will use:

- Do not use things such as Popsicle® sticks or twigs that could poke your baby’s mouth, skin or eyes.
- If you are using items such as bells, beans, stones or other small objects to put inside of rattles or other toys:
  - Keep these objects out of your child’s reach when making the toy
  - Enclose them in a secure container with tape or permanent glue (glue that will not dissolve in water) or sew them inside of the fabric you are using
- Instead of using yarn, string or fishing line (that could cut off circulation to a finger, toe or airway), use shoestring or thicker cord, never longer than 12 inches.
- Substitute balloons with plastic balls or other plastic items in your home. Balloons when broken can be inhaled, causing suffocation.
- If possible, when making toys for young babies from paper or cardboard, cover them with tape or contact/adhesive shelf paper.
- Be sure that all materials you use to decorate, such as paints and markers, are **NON-TOXIC**.

Young babies explore everything with their **MOUTHS**, which is an important component of **LEARNING**.

If you are concerned about your baby putting such a toy in his mouth, only use the toy when you can be involved in the activity and play, then, put it away for the next time.
Purchased Toys

Consider These Tips When Choosing a Toy for Children and Share Them With Anyone Who May Be Donating Toys to Your Center...

Is it suited to the CHILD’S DEVELOPMENT LEVEL?

Most toys bear a “recommended age” sticker, which should be taken as a starting point in the selection process. Be realistic about children’s abilities and level of maturity when choosing an age-appropriate toy. Any toys that have projectiles, for example, are never suitable for a child under age 4 and even some 6-year-olds aren’t mature enough to handle these toys. Likewise, if your 3-year old still puts everything into his mouth, continue to steer clear of toys and games with small parts and pieces.

Think BIG “OK” “Not OK”

Toy parts should be bigger than the child’s mouth up to age 3 to avoid the chance of choking. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has designed a Small Object Tester you can use to determine if a toy could potentially cause choking. If a toy or part of a toy can fit inside a toilet paper roll cylinder, then it’s not safe.

Look for toys that are WELL PUT TOGETHER.

Make sure tails are securely sewn, seams of stuffed animals are reinforced, and paint is not peeling. Stuffed animals should also be free of buttons, yarn, ribbons, and anything else your child could yank off and put in his mouth.

Is the toy too HEAVY?

Could babies be harmed if it fell on them? If so, pass.

Continued
Are children PHYSICALLY READY for this toy?

For example, parents with older children often buy a bike one size too big to save themselves from buying a new bike the next year. Ask yourself, “Do the children in my care have the physical skills to safely control the toy, such as a bigger bike?” Consider having separate areas for toddlers riding push toys and preschoolers riding tricycles or bicycles.

Is the toy in GOOD CONDITION?

Used toys donated to your center or bought at yard sales can be worn or frayed, which can be sometimes harmful. Examine all new or used toys for buttons, batteries, ribbons, eyes, beads, or plastic appendages that could easily be chewed or snapped off.

Is there a STRING or CORD on the toy longer than 12 INCHES?

A cord can too easily be wrapped around a young child's neck, causing strangulation. Once children can climb up on their hands and knees, remove crib gyms and hanging mobiles from the crib. Be particularly vigilant about older toys. For example, the 5-year-old model of a popular play kitchen has a phone attached with a potentially deadly cord, while the latest model of the same kitchen has the more current and safer cordless phone.

A representative of the ____________________ Program on ______ (Date) reviewed the Growing Great Kids™ Toy Safety Guidelines document with me. I understand the importance of following these safety guidelines when providing manufactured and homemade toys for my child/children.

Homemade Toys

I agree to use homemade toys only when an adult is supervising their use.

Purchased Toys

I will remove from my home manufactured and homemade toys when they are damaged or no longer safe for my child/children.

Print Parent’s/Family Member’s Name ___________________________ Date ___________ Parent’s/Family Member’s Signature ___________________________

Print Parent’s/Family Member’s Name ___________________________ Date ___________ Parent’s/Family Member’s Signature ___________________________

Program Representative’s Signature ___________________________ Date ___________