

Children's Health Study

The True Value Of Play

(NAPSA)—It may surprise parents to learn that the benefits of play could extend beyond fun and games.

According to *Pediatrics in Review*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, play “offers children important developmental benefits and parents the opportunity to fully engage with their children.”

Indeed, research continues to reveal that playtime helps build social and critical thinking skills in children, and that it may help with balance and dexterity. There's even evidence that playing can help bond parent and child.

Those benefits may be particularly important for youngsters who have special needs. An estimated 10 million families across the U.S. have a child with physical, developmental or emotional disabilities and chronic medical problems, according to Children's Hospital Boston's “Children's News.”

Many of these families can tap into resources designed specifically to help their kids get more out of play. For instance, a newly revamped Web site called www.AblePlay.org reviews toys from the marketplace and evaluates them based on their relevance and benefits to children with special needs.

It features a rating system divided by disability category (physical, sensory, cognitive, etc.) and also lists toys by the possible



Children with special needs could benefit from the right kind of play.

benefits they may present. Additionally, parents can search toys by their manufacturer or their child's age.

Also important, the site may help save parents money by allowing them to more thoroughly evaluate a toy—and its alternatives—before buying.

“Many parents purchase expensive adaptive toys without realizing that there are regular toys out there that work just as well or better for a fraction of the cost,” says Ellen Metrick, who evaluates toys for the site.

Parents who visit the Web site can also help support the National Lekotek Center, a division of Anixter Center. The nonprofit group provides family-centered, play-based services for children with disabilities. For more information, visit www.AblePlay.org, e-mail RMendoza@lekotek.org, or call (800) 366-PLAY, ext. 401.