

## Beyond Fun --

### Five Secret Gifts Toys Can Deliver



Toys are a highlight of most children's lives. Under the plastic and packaging, *and invisible to most kids*, many toys have hidden attributes that can secretly sneak in. Fortunately, if the child and parent were aware, they would surely be welcomed.

Toys deliver much more than fun and play is a process that builds and develops a whole host of abilities in a child. This is the reason the AblePlay website at [www.ableplay.org](http://www.ableplay.org) was formed. Its mission is to highlight toys that are fun and appropriate for children, especially those with special needs, and to help their parents find the right toys for their child's recreational enjoyment as well as their developmental achievements.

### So here's a list of five hidden benefits the right toy can deliver:

1. **Social Connection.** Toys are social magnets and connect kids socially better than glue. In other words, they promote inclusion. The whole family can play together and this helps children who have disabilities relate to their siblings, friends and relatives.
2. **Self-esteem.** There are toys that help children build new skills and confidence. They range from bikes without pedals to baseball tees that allow for easy hitting. Through the act of play, kids push through limitations, explore new skills and test new ways to deal with the world.
3. **Self-motivation.** Often, children who resist working at a goal can be convinced to move towards it when toys and play are the reward (but don't tell them that). That what makes play so powerful--the child gets to lead. And if the kid is "driving his own toy bus," he can take himself to places he never would have advanced to if prompted or promoted by a parent.
4. **Stress relief.** Play is the perfect way for a child to detox from the stress of school, and socially taxing situations. Whether a child gets hooked with a hobby like painting or breaks a sweat pedaling a bike, play allows him or her to refresh and refuel from the tasks and trials of the day. Play can help a child move out of a bad mood, release muscle tensions and imagine a world they can absolutely delight in.
5. **Sensory input.** Whether you want to add sensory stimulations to your child's diet or soothing sensations, play can do it. You can look at toys from an auditory, tactile and visual perspective allowing parents to work with a child's individual needs. Sometimes a kid needs a trampoline more than a treat when they come home from school. And a toy that plays Mozart can soothe better than sweets can.



So the next time you buy your child a toy, share the delight by knowing you are providing way more than fun.

AblePlay™ is a website at [www.ableplay.org](http://www.ableplay.org) that researches, rates and provides comprehensive information on toys for children with disabilities. Our mission is to help parents, family, and professionals can make the best choices and purchases for the children in their lives.