



RETRO & CLASSIC TOYS HELP Bridge the Gap BETWEEN Generations

by Kristin Morency Goldman, communications specialist, Toy Industry Association

From Strawberry Shortcake and Hello Kitty to Lite-Brite and basic wind-up toys, classic playthings and retro characters seem to be taking over the toy aisle. First identified by the Toy Industry Association (TIA) as an industry trend in 2013 (and gaining even more momentum this year), nostalgic toys and games bring kids, parents, and grandparents together in reminiscent fun.

At TIA, we were curious to explore how the reappearance of these tried-and-true products and brands influence play—specifically, intergenerational play—so we posed the question to toy and child development experts across a range of disciplines. Here's what they had to say:

Intergenerational Connections

According to Susan V. Bosak, educator, author, and chair of an international social innovation group called The Legacy Project, one-on-one personal time with mature

adults is highly beneficial for children, who often get “too much peer socialization [and] too much mediated contact through computers and texting.” Spending time with older adults allows children to build self-confidence, discover their roots and history, and develop “a sense of continuity and perspective,” says Bosak.

Parents and grandparents reap great benefits from playing with children, too. “Active, involved older adults with close intergenerational connections consistently report much less depression, better physical health, and higher degrees of life satisfaction,” says Bosak. “They tend to be happier with their present life and more hopeful for the future.”

Parents today are generally eager to connect with their kids and spend quality time together as a family, says Sharyn Timerman, a child development specialist in Montreal, Canada. “There is a lot more education available [than in previous decades] and both parents and grandparents are being encouraged to participate on a more interactive level.”

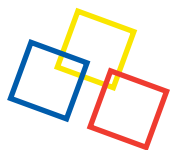
Play, while inherently fun, is also an integral part of the parenting process. “There are so many facets to building a relationship with one's children. They are based on rules and boundaries, health and safety, and another component would be play,” says Timerman. “Through play there are many ‘teachable moments.’”

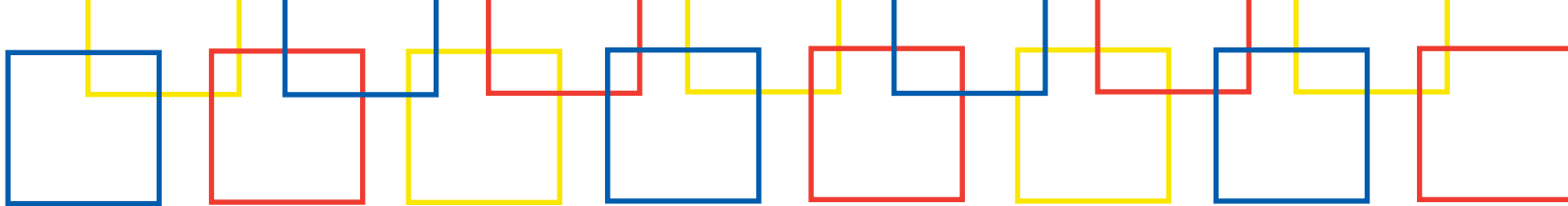
Grandparents and other older relatives who are not primary caregivers make great playmates, too, because “the discipline element is not usually the focus,” says Timerman. Playing with a grandparent who is frail or hard of hearing may arouse empathy in children and teach them how to

BENEFITS OF FAMILY PLAY

Whether you're 6 or 60 years old, play is an enriching activity and when younger and older generations play together, the benefits are even greater! Playing together as a multi-generational family:

1. Strengthens bonds
2. Builds shared memories
3. Fosters mutual respect and learning
4. Reduces stress for both parents and kids
5. Develops skills, coordination, and keeps everyone sharp and alert





adapt to meet the needs of a loved one. It's also a great opportunity for older generations to talk about their own childhood memories and share lessons learned through life experiences.

Fun for All Ages

According to Dr. Scott Eberle, vice president for play studies at The Strong and editor of the *American Journal of Play*, engaging in unstructured play is doubly important these days, thanks to a rise in sports and other organized activities for children that often “turn parents into spectators and kids into aspiring professionals.”

“Traditional toys that draw from skills that generations share or enjoy developing, such as Frisbee, will appeal to wide ranges, as well as [retro] toys like Silly Putty, the Magic 8 Ball, or the Ouija Board,” says Eberle. Other great options include open-ended toys, such as soap bubbles and 3-D puzzles; toys that invite “kibitzing,” such as jigsaw puzzles or construction toys; and classic games, such as checkers or chess.

Open-ended and classic toys are particularly conducive to intergenerational play because they tend to be engaging and appropriate for all ages. On the other hand, toys that carry complex back stories can become obstacles to getting parents involved in playing with their children, says Eberle. “These [toys] largely exclude parents who haven’t the time or the inclination to master the pantheon of characters and their interrelationships.”

Timerman agrees that classic forms of play are paramount to bringing kids and adults together. Simple activities such as kicking around a soccer ball, playing outdoors with bug catchers, or simply enjoying a pajama day offer fun and enriching ways to connect as a family. ■

Toymakers and retailers are invited to check TIA’s consumer-facing website—www.ToyInfo.org—for free play advice and resources that can be shared with parents and caregivers. Additional information about toy trends and other data can be found in the “Industry Facts” section at www.ToyAssociation.org.

TIA’S PLAY TIPS FOR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

(FROM “ALL ABOUT PLAY” AT WWW.TOYINFO.ORG)

TIP 1: CHOOSE TOYS THAT ARE GOOD FOR EVERYONE’S AGES AND SKILL LEVELS.

That may mean family games, toys that are suitable for a range of ages, or playthings that don’t have rules and encourage imaginative, open-ended play.

TIP 2: BE REALISTIC ABOUT TOLERANCE LEVELS.

When you’re deciding what play activity to do, think about your grandkids’ ages and attention spans, as well as how much mess and noise you can actually stand.

TIP 3: DON’T BE TOO CONCERNED ABOUT FINISHING THE ACTIVITY.

Remember, this is about spending time with each other and having fun.

TIP 4: LOOSEN UP.

If your grandkids transform a traditional activity into a new kind of game, go with it! You don’t always have to follow the rules (as long as it’s safe and appropriate, of course).

TIP 5: THINK ABOUT WHO SHOULD LEAD THE ACTIVITY.

Even though you’re the adult, you don’t always need to hold the reins! Letting the kids direct the play can help them foster confidence, leadership skills, and problem-solving abilities.

TIP 6: PLAN FOR MORE ACTIVITIES THAN YOU THINK YOU’LL NEED.

Kids’ short attention spans may mean you’ll go through more games than expected. And if you don’t get to them all, you can always save those ideas for another day!

