

Parents: play time important

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it is an African fabric, but traditionally it's used during funerals. It is not appropriate for children's toys. When manufacturers chose the fabrics it gives it an African look, but it is a misuse of the cloth."

Folayan says choosing toys that are ethnically incorrect can have far-reaching effects on young children. They may develop insecurities about their looks.

"Toys are fantasy," she said. "As children play, they become part of their games. You don't want your child with short hair to dream only of long hair."

Experts say price should not be a factor in choosing toys, either. Breaking the family bank does not necessarily mean children will be delighted by gifts. Many appropriate toys are relatively inexpensive.

Davis said the answer does not rest with the price tag, and excessive spending is not a good idea.

"Young children cannot comprehend cost, and their favorite toys often are the least expensive," she said. "Stressing the budget to make the family happy can backfire by causing extra tension. The children may even feel responsible for the stress."

Folayan says it's never too late to introduce children to ethnically correct toys. But if children have only received white dolls, they may need enticement to play with black ones.

"Begin by talking with the child," Folayan said. "Give them positive messages to affirm their self-esteem. Tell them how beautiful their hair, lips, eyes and noses are. Affirm the beauty of other

people of color who are family members. Toys should be used to reinforce those images.

"It's going to take time for them to become comfortable with black dolls. The important thing is that parents realize how important it is that children receive realistic toys."

Here are some guidelines for choosing children's toys:

- Choose toys that foster creative play. Will it stimulate the child's initiative, imagination and skills?

- Choose toys that help children learn how to learn. Toys that require decision-making can help build self-confidence.

- Make sure children have a wide variety of toys. Choose toys for all the child's developing needs.

- Watch the age appropriateness of each gift. Don't rush children to toys for older ages.

- Choose toys that will grow with the child. These must be sturdy to last several years.

- Choose toys that reinforce self-esteem.

"Play time really is important," Folayan said. "Children will develop self-esteem during all activities, including play. Having inappropriate toys, or toys that don't reflect them can be harmful to children."

- Choose toys that look like your child.

"My daughter likes Barbie dolls," Folayan said. "A good choice for us was Nigerian Barbie. Her features were very ethnic and she came with a little book that explained the ori-

gins of her outfit and had a map of African that pinpointed Nigeria."

Folayan turned down a request for a black Airline Barbie.

"She was a white doll with a black face," Folayan said. "There was nothing about her that I found developmentally good for my children. There just was no positive."

Davis recommended gifts with open-ended activities that will stretch the child's imagination.

"Art supplies - like colors, paper, paint - or boxes with costume-type clothes can entertain children for hours," Davis said. "Kitchen sets, doll houses, balls and construction toys can be enjoyed long after Christmas day."

Safety is a major consideration for all ages, but especially for those under 3. Davis said to make sure all toy pieces are larger than the end of a toilet paper tube.

When giving gifts like bicycles, skates and skateboards, include safety equipment like helmets and knee pads.

"The most important gifts cannot be purchased. They are the gifts of time, patience and a high self-esteem," Davis said. "Parents should not let the stress of gift buying hinder a healthy relationship with their children."

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Dance chooses just the right number

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Along the way, "Honey Hush" peeks into the bedroom, tells sisters how to stop an evil man and deals with sexism.

My personal favorite is "The Black Church and Churchgoers." Nothing is as funny as people in church.

Included among Dance's selections is Mabley doing one of her infamous routines about her "o-o-o-l-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d, pu-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-u-y, moldy man."

According to Mabley, her man was so old and puny that after a funeral, the undertaker told him not to leave the mortuary.

In addition to Mabley, Whoopi Goldberg appears in her alter ego Fontaine and comedy newcomer Hazelle does her too-funny "Not Going to Stop 'til I Make it to de Top."

Dance includes sections from Alice Walker's classic "The Color Purple" (the nasty consequences of Celie's "beat her" advice to Harpo) and Valerie Walker Wesley's "Devil's Gonna Get Him" and Tina McElroy Ansa's "Ugly Ways."

Also included are hilarious thoughts and tales from Harlem Renaissance writer Ann Petry, actress Ethel Waters and legendary blues songbirds Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday.

Dance culls slave narratives and classic black autobiographies for juicy tidbits like Amanda Smith's "Brother Johnson's Search for a Colored Wife." Dance also does extensive oral research that yields folk tales "The 15 inch Pianist," (you don't want me to tell you why that's funny) and "A Man Won't Make a Fool of Me Twice."

In addition to the foreword, poet/professor Nikki Giovanni adds two selections the oft-repeated "Ego Trippin'" and the interesting introduction she provides students taking her courses at Virginia Tech.

It's no secret that black people use humor to get through the tough times. It's also no secret that humor sometimes masks the sorrow.

Dance realizes that and uses it to make Honey Hush! a classic.

To quote the venerable Moms, "chile, it sho' is funny."

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