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Kids don't need costly Christmas toys: NICMA

Childminders say kids are better off with 'back to basics' play

Date issued: 8th December 2008

See also 'Credit crunch play ideas' and photos issued with this release – caption details in Editor's notes.

Children don't need expensive toys at Christmas and are much better off with basic playthings – that's the cost-conscious message to parents from NICMA – the Childminding Association.

An increasing number of childminders in Northern Ireland are adopting a 'back to basics' approach to children's play – using materials like cardboard boxes, sheets, and pots and pans.

NICMA says the results show that kids get far more out of using everyday items and natural materials than they do from the latest computer game or electronic toy.

"You'd be amazed what children can do with a couple of cardboard boxes or tyres," says NICMA's Director, Bridget Nodder.

"They have such a ball, and you'll find that this sort of everyday item stimulates their imagination and creativity much more than many of the costly toys on the shelves this Christmas."

One childminder who has embraced this approach is Wendy Smyth who looks after eight children at her home in Antrim.

"I've collected together lots of things like bicycle tyres, planks of wood, and even crates from the milkman so the children can make dens in the garden," she explains.

“Indoors, I provide them with things like cardboard boxes, old sheets, and kitchen utensils.

“The kids just love playing and creating with these really simple things – and they actively prefer to play with these items rather than the plastic toys I would have relied on before.

“I’ve also stepped back from directing their play in the way I would have previously – and I can already see a real improvement in their self-confidence, initiative, creativity and ability to problem-solve.”

Another childminder who’s taken up the ‘back to basics’ approach is Mavis Donaghy.

Mavis looks after six children aged between two years and five years at her home in Cookstown.

“Previously, I would generally have given the younger children the normal sort of toys you buy in shops,” she says.

“But now I’m more likely to give them a cardboard box or some junk art materials – and you’d be amazed what they can do with these very simple objects.

“Children can be really inventive if you let them use their imagination.”

Bridget Nodder says NICMA does appreciate that parents don’t want to disappoint their children at Christmas.

“We’re not suggesting that parents don’t buy any toys at all for their children – but we are saying ‘Don’t feel guilty if you have to cut back on what you spend on them,’” she explains.

“There are alternative cheaper play opportunities which you can offer your children which will help them develop vital skills in a very enjoyable way.”

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Editor’s notes:

1. NICMA – the Childminding Association is a charity, and is the sole organisation representing childminders in Northern Ireland. 74% of registered childminders here are members. For more details about NICMA, please go to: www.nicma.org
2. For further details contact Bridget Nodder, NICMA Director at 0870 200 2063 or e-mail bridget.nodder@nicma.org

