



MEDIA RELEASE

REF.: TRA/05/0301
DATE: 19th April 2005
WORDS: Approx. 900

ALL winter long we've been bombarded with magazine and newspaper articles and TV programmes highlighting how many adults are unfit and the growing number of children who are overweight. Now's the time to put things right!

SOME TOYS ARE MORE THAN JUST KIDS STUFF!

Traditionally this is the time of the year when we pay particular attention to the garden. Visits to garden centres will peak over the next few weeks and garden shows and television programmes will have us all muttering 'why doesn't mine look like that?'

It's a good time also to consider how children-friendly your garden is, particularly when it comes to encouraging exercise and activities that require a lot of running around. It's not just the plants and shrubs that need growing room, so why not check out the toy shop next weekend too?

Play helps children develop confidence, self-esteem and creativity and every child deserves the chance to play. But is there a benefit for everyone in play activities and playing with toys?

More follows/

Children have been up against it in the activity and play stakes for quite a while. Only 6% of schools are now reckoned to have a gym and fewer children walk to school. Certainly for many older children the idea of combining toys and play has been overtaken by the need to look 'cool' and do nothing.

Not so many years ago couch potatoes were a sorry sight rather than the norm, mainly because many of the hi-tech console games people of all ages now enjoy had yet to arrive on the scene. If you wanted to play you had to get up and move about, even if only to crawl on the floor with the train set.

Also far off on the horizon was fast food, junk food and dinner TVs. The last 20 years has seen our children slow down and become bulkier.

As well as the obvious keep fit benefits, play also enriches children's social skills as well as their physical well-being. It's good for them at all ages and it can be good for the whole family, combining the benefits of exercise with interaction with children.

Vigorous play can help in maintaining a healthy body, helping combat diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease.

The traditional toy market grew by more than 3% last year and the fastest growing category was 'Outdoor/Sports' toys, which increased 11% in the first six months of the year (January - June 2004). This represents a staggering 22% of all money spent on toys during the first six months of 2004.

And what was the best seller of last summer? Well, it was the old favourite, the Swingball, the one garden activity that most of today's parents can recall from their younger days and an activity that brings benefits to the whole family.

And there are a whole host of others following on in the popularity stakes. Popular activities and brands include paddling pools from Intex, larger 10' diameter pools for older children and adults, and the got-to-have for all garden adventures on warm days, water guns from Mattel and Hasbro!

More follows/

And which little boy (and many fathers too!) doesn't enjoy playing with other outdoor favourites such as JCB tractor and trailers - great fun and very useful for moving loads around the sandpit.

With small children, say up to seven or eight, it's relatively easy to encourage them to use outdoor play equipment, such as slides, swings and climbing frames. In fact, with nursery age children the trouble starts when you try and leave the play area!

But in addition to the obvious benefits of cardio-vascular activity in the fresh air there are a number of benefits adults can get from toy play. And it can be great fun, too.

Swingball is classed as a toy in the outdoor play/sports category and not as sports equipment. If it was classed as the latter it would fall outside of the definition of a toy, which is a *material or article intended for use in play by children of less than 14 years*.

For parents who become overweight and out of shape, the problem is that they can't enjoy their children's play activities, with or without toys. It takes surprisingly little time to get enough activity into your day. Inactive people are more likely to get sick. Or they just don't have the stamina to enjoy their lives.

Playing with toys and interacting with children makes it easy to be active and physical activity is good for everyone. We need to remember that it's never too late to start and any activity is better than none.

According to research in New Zealand a 10 percent increase in the number of physically active adults would save around 300 lives each year in that country alone - and five times this number could be saved if every adult was sufficiently active.

So, adults who enjoy Swingball and garden trampolines can not only encourage their children to get active, they prove that, thankfully, there is a little of the child in all of us.

More follows/

Perhaps now is the time for the shrubs and bedding plants to make a little more room for the children and adults to benefit from playing outdoors; why not include a visit to your local toy shop next time you're out shopping for garden features?

This year Easter came early and with it some fairly fine weather for the time of year. Again it appears that outdoor products were selling well fairly early on in the season.

Let's hope that the British weather gives all parents the opportunity to encourage outdoor play this summer and that the paddling pools, swing balls and water guns, all bought on a warm day early in the year prove a worthwhile investment for months to come.

-ends-

For further information please contact:

Toy Retailers Association (formerly the BATR)
Gainsborough Waterfront Enterprise Centre
Lea Road
GAINSBOROUGH
DN21 1LX

Secretary: Derek Markie derek.markie@toyretailersassociation.co.uk
Tel 08707 537437 Fax 08707 060042
Email enquiries@toyretailersassociation.co.uk
Website www.toyretailersassociation.co.uk

For photographs or further information about this press release, contact:

Simon Brian
Simon Brian Public Relations
Tel 0116 269 5919
Email simon@simonbrian.co.uk