

# TAMING TOY MOUNTAIN



by Catherine Davis

**There are two truths about becoming a parent:**

- 1. You are going to lose some sleep.*
- 2. Your home becomes a warehouse of kids' toys.*

## **Lots and lots of toys.**

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the barrage of new toys arriving steadily from grandparents, family, and friends. Each birthday, holiday, and a trip to the dollar store can result in new toys being added to your child's collection. And with Christmas just around the corner, now is a great time to take stock of your child's existing toys and plan an exit strategy for any unused or outgrown toys. By following a few proven steps used routinely by professional organizers, you'll have that toy mountain tamed in no time.

## **Corral Toys in One Place**

First, gather all the toys to one location in your home. Pick a

spot that is large enough to accommodate all the toys and ideally still leave you some extra space. If you have a large number of toys consider using the basement or an under-utilized room on the main floor, such as a formal dining room. If the thought of gathering up toys seems overwhelming, don't be afraid to elicit help from your spouse, a relative, or best friend. Assign each helper a room and an empty laundry basket or plastic bin with instructions to fill their baskets with toys and dump the toys in the room you have chosen to centralize them. Think of this step as a stealth attack. The idea is to gather up all the toys as quickly as possible, not worrying about sorting them at this stage in the process.

## **Pair Like with Like**

Once all the toys are gathered in one room, you may feel a little overwhelmed by the sheer volume of it, but don't despair. The next step will be easier with all the toys in one spot. Begin by sorting each toy into piles grouped by category: stuffed animals, Legos, arts and crafts, cars, dolls, games and puzzles, costumes, video games, tools, balls, etc. Create one pile for any unidentified toy pieces and one pile for broken or damaged toys. Continue sorting until all the toys are grouped into piles. Depending on how much stuff you have you may find it useful to further divide the piles into sub-categories, for example, the doll pile could be further divided into piles of Barbies, Barbie accessories, and larger baby dolls.

## Trim It Down

Now that everything is divided into piles of similar toys, you can easily see exactly what your child has and has too much of. Time to look at each pile and attack each one individually.

First to toss out is all the stuff that is easy to let go of—junk toys. This includes toys that are broken or missing too many pieces, party favours, Happy Meal toys, the assortment of unidentified toy pieces, and bald Barbies. Put them directly into a black garbage bag.

Next, when looking at each pile think, does my child play with it? Does your child have Thomas trains but outgrew them years ago? Does your child have tons of DVDs but prefers to play Fortnite on your cell phone? Is your child searching YouTube but still hanging on to primary ABCs books? Think of what your child realistically uses and decide if there is anything you could donate or pass along to family members without your child really missing it. Create a new pile for items you can donate. And if you are saving it for a younger child consider boxing it up and moving it to a location in the house that children don't use.

When looking at the remaining piles do you see multiples of the same toy? Consider the following: does your child really need fifty stuffies? Does your child play with 20 Barbie dolls, or do they only use the newest one? Does your child have three different sets of Memory and multiple packs of UNO? Multiples of the same toy take up valuable space in your home. Now is the time to be ruthless in your decision making. Keep only the best of any multiple toys, move the "ok" ones to the donation pile, and dispose of any that are not appropriate to donate.

## Donating Used Toys

Here are some organizations you can donate used toys to:

- **Value Village**
- **Salvation Army Donor Welcome Centres**
- **Durham Region Reuse Days** – Check Durham Region's Events Calendar for a Reuse Day in your municipality. <https://calendar.durham.ca>
- **Bibles for Missions Thrift Stores**  
[www.missionthriftstore.com](http://www.missionthriftstore.com)
- **Art With a Heart Inc.** – Art With A Heart Inc. is a registered Canadian charity located in the Durham Region, dedicated to using the talents and resources of like-minded, creative individuals to assist and empower people from local community special interest groups. For example autism, Alzheimer's, brain injury, behavioural issues, mental health, physically disabled, poverty, substance abuse, seniors, etc.) Accepts art supplies such as paint, markers, paper, and glue.  
[www.artwithaheart.ca](http://www.artwithaheart.ca)
- **Diabetes Canada** <https://declutter.diabetes.ca/pickup>



## Selling Toys

If you would like to sell your gently used kid stuff, a few brick and mortar stores offer cash on the spot.

- **Once Upon a Child**

Pays cash on the spot for costumes, toys, books, electronics, bikes, kitchen sets, ride-ons, and name brand kid clothes.

[www.ouonceuponachild.com](http://www.ouonceuponachild.com)

- **Déjà vu Discs**

Buys PS4, PS3, XBOX ONE, XBOX 360, XBOX Original, Wii, DS, PSP, PS2, and GameCube games. <https://dejavudiscs.com>

## Online Selling

In addition to Facebook Marketplace, VarageSale, and Letgo, there are various Facebook groups in Durham region dedicated to selling kid stuff. You will need to open a Facebook account if you don't have one and request to join each group. Typically, each group has its own rules that you must read and agree to abide to become a member of the group. If you are selling toys, it is best to offer a great deal by grouping like items together and to sell them at a bargain price (i.e., instead of selling one Barbie for \$3, sell six Barbie dolls and their carrying case for \$20.) Remember, this is stuff you want out of your house.

- Oshawa/Whitby Mom's Buy/Swap
- Durham Region's Buy, Sell and Trade Group
- Durham Canada Buy&sell
- Pickering/Ajax/Whitby/Oshawa & GTA Buy & Sell
- Ajax/Clarington/Oshawa/Whitby Buy & Sell Group

If you are nervous about opening your door to a total stranger, you can arrange for what is commonly called a "porch pick up"—you leave the item for sale outside your front door, and the buyer leaves cash between your doors or in a spot you specify. Porch pickups are only suitable for smaller cash transactions as there is the risk that someone could take your item and not leave their payment. Other options for pick up include meeting at a public place such as a local library or coffee shop.

## Toy Swap

A toy swap is also a great idea if you have access to a large space, such as a community centre or church hall. Parents can drop off used toys and exchange them for other used toys. The simplest swap assumes all toys have the same value so that if you bring one toy, you can swap it for one toy. This works for smaller toys but is not practical if someone wants to swap a more expensive toy, such as a bike. If your swap is going to accept expensive toys, you will need volunteers to assign values to all the toys so that swaps remain equitable. Ensure you have enough volunteers to pack up any remaining toys and take them to charity.

## Suggest Toy Alternatives

Providing a shopping list to relatives at Christmas can help stem a toy overload. Consider asking for creative alternatives to toys such as gift certificates to local attractions, such as the movies or your family's favourite ice cream parlour. A nice idea is to have your child tell the gift giver about your outing and how much they enjoyed it.



## Organizing Your Space After Christmas

Now that your child has new toys you'll need to figure out where to put them in your home. Toys will be used regularly if your child has easy access to them. Consider setting up themed play stations so your child will be sure to use all their toys. For example, a kitchen set and food toys could be placed near your kitchen to encourage a child to pretend cook while watching you prepare a meal. An art station with markers, paper, and stickers could be stored in a cupboard closest to your kitchen table. Legos could be relegated to an under-utilized guest bedroom to encourage creative play away from the TV and to keep the Legos out from underfoot. Books can be stored in a bookshelf near a favourite comfy chair or beside the bed to encourage bedtime reading. Costumes get more use when they are stored on a hanging rack near a full-length mirror. A mesh container for balls, sidewalk chalk, and outdoor toys can be stored in the garage for easy access when heading outdoors.

Storage of toys should take in several factors: your available space, ease of access, and ease of tidying up. Since many toys come with plastic packaging which must be destroyed to free the toy, you often end up with a toy and a lot of loose pieces that have no storage container. Clear bins with lids are a great option because they can be purchased in a variety of shapes to fit shelves, under beds, or the space under a coffee table. If your child has no shelves in their bedroom, look for a plastic tower with several clear drawers to take advantage of vertical space, or purchase stackable clear bins with hinged lids. Help younger children sort toys into the correct bins by taping a photo of the toy to the outside of the bin.

Other good toy storage alternatives include: inexpensive mesh hangers suspended from the ceiling to keep toys off the floor, purchasing a bed frame with built in drawers, covering a full wall with storage cubes, hanging storage nets in the corner of a room, purchasing a bench with storage cubbies underneath the seat, or placing toys in an over-the-door hanging shoe holder.

## Toy Rotation

Still too many toys after Christmas? Consider implementing a toy rotation. Start by placing all your child's toys in large storage bin containers and number each one. Start the rotation by giving your child Bin #1. Place all the other bins

in a location your child does not have access to. When your child starts to get bored of the toys in Bin #1, pack up those toys, move Bin #1 to the location with the other bins, and give your child Bin #2. Continue this method until all the toys are rotated through. The rotation keeps your child's interest and limits the number of toys that need to be tidied up.

Not sure when to rotate your child's toys? Watch for clues from your child and rotate a new bin when they seem to lose interest in the current bin's toys. Worried that your child may not want to rotate certain favourite toys? Leave any toys that are favourites and used on a regular basis out of the rotation, such as Legos. Don't be so strict with your rotation system that there isn't any room for flexibility.

## Why Less is More

According to a study published in the journal *Infant Behaviour and Development*, toddlers have not mastered higher level control over attention. Their attention, and therefore their play may be disrupted by factors in their environment that present distraction. The result of the study suggest that an abundance of toys may create such a distraction and that when provided with fewer toys, toddlers engage in longer periods of play with a single toy, allowing better focus to explore and play more creatively.

Author, Joshua Becker, also agrees. In his book, *Clutterfree with Kids*, Becker argues that fewer toys are better for children because sparse playrooms encourage creativity, help develop attention spans, and teach youngsters about taking care of their possessions.

In my own experience I have found that children with organized rooms are proud of their space and enjoy showing and sharing their rooms with friends.

## Final words

If your child receives an excessive number of toys at Christmas, count your blessings and be grateful for generous friends and family. And if some of those new toys do happen to remain unopened, you can always donate them to a toy drive next year.

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