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## Using Training Toys in Your Sessions

**To implement effective training sessions, pay close attention to two essential components:**

### “The What”

The training topic and teachable content and

### “The How”

The training delivery approach and process. Another key ingredient to productive sessions is the facilitator's ability to create a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere that enhances both the content and the process. One easy way to help achieve this goal is to spice up the training environment with childhood toys such as playdough, pipe cleaners and coloured crayons.

No one ever said that training sessions have to be boring. Remembering that your participants are adult learners and they bring much experience and many assets to training sessions. Think inventively about how to keep trainees engaged and invested in your training sessions; reflect upon your childhood when learning was playful and recreate some of these positive and fun experiences

### Toys create a fun and relaxed environment

Training sessions should provide participants an opportunity not only to learn new knowledge and acquire relevant skills but also to have an enjoyable experience. Toys at the train table help set a tone that learning is fun, heighten participant interest in the training session, create comfortable space, and give participants the license to approach training in a different way. Before training pass out cans of playdough and strings of pipe cleaners and emphasize that members may play freely with these toys during activities and throughout the entire session. A relaxed atmosphere helps facilitate optimal learning, and with the use of experiential learning methods and cooperative learning training activities you increase the probability for teaching your training goals.

### Toys stimulate creativity and involvement

Sometimes idea-generating activities such as brainstorming on newsprint are overdone and become boring; the simple introduction of a training toy may energise participants. For example, during brainstorming sessions, use a stress ball to call on participants to share an idea. The use of a physical object not only focuses everyone to stay alert in case the ball comes their way. In addition, a stress ball helps the facilitator and participants visually monitor who participates the most or least. If one goal of the group brainstorming is to promote equal participation, the facilitator can establish ground rules such as "everyone must touch the stress ball at least once" or "no one person can touch the stress ball more than three times".



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### Toys Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners

Using toys during training activities offers participants with diverse learning styles alternatives to traditional training formats. Research shows that participants who spend most of their time being physically active (i.e. not only sitting at desks), often find it very difficult to maintain concentration for long periods of time. Having something to do with their hands heightens concentration and extends their attention span.

Kinesthetic learners – individuals who prefer learning through hands on activities or those of high visual-spatial intelligence – individuals who perceive and understand the world best through visualized objects, spatial dimensions, mental images, and hands-on creativity may feel more comfortable with the use of play-doh and pipe cleaners than simply traditional training aids (eg paper, pencil, newsprint). When leading a training session on individual goal setting, consider having members use multi-coloured finger paints or markers, along with traditional pens and newsprint to express persona goals. Ideally, allow participants to choose among several modes of expression to reach the same training outcomes. ([a good blog on kinesthetics](#))

### Toys rechannel doodling habits

Provide alternatives to common learning environment habits such as pencil sketching and doodling which hinder participant attention in a training session. Hands-on training toys are quiet alternatives to the distracting noise produced by table tapping pens or bubble gum popping. At the start of your session, encourage participants to occupy their hands with silent, pro-active playthings while they focus their eyes and ears on the training topic. Before you know it, participants will be designing creative works of art while they remain engaged in the training session.

### Toys Serve as Rewards, Reminders, and Incentives.

Pass out training toys to participants to reward them for their involvement and their work during the session. Give a participant a stress ball used during the training session to provide a subtle reminder of accomplishments at the session.; encourage the individual to keep the stress ball in a visible place, such as at his/her desk or a regular meeting site. In addition, training toys can be effective incentives during (eg to reward prompt returns from session breaks) or after a training session (eg to help collect [post-training evaluation forms](#) (an excellent website that offers free forms and information).

Training toys can make a huge difference in energizing your training sessions. When you bring fun and creativity into the training environment, your members not only will stay engaged in the sessions but also will enjoy themselves ?

Reproduced from Frames of Mind:  
The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. NY Gardner



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