

Ideas for the Tonal Wooden Magnetic Shapes (EL47505)

These chunky wooden pieces invite children to join, pull, turn, stack, roll and balance. There is no single 'right' outcome. A younger child may be fascinated by two pieces clicking together, while an older child may return to repeatedly solve a wobble in their construction. One resource that can adapt to the needs, interests and stages of the child.



For Babies (10 months +) and Younger Toddlers

- Offer a few shapes on a firm floor or low surface, with an attentive adult nearby. Allow time for grasping, touching, transferring and close inspection.
- Model joining two pieces, then pause. The tiny pull, click and release can become a wonderfully absorbing investigation.
- Try using simple, responsive language: 'You joined them', 'It came apart', 'Round and smooth', 'Again?'
- Build a short tower for the child to knock down, rebuild or completely ignore. Their response tells you where the interest lies.

Schematic Play

- For children interested in positioning, offer a clear surface for lining up, arranging, enclosing and making repeated patterns.
- For rotation, notice the turning, rolling and spinning of curved pieces.
- For connecting and disconnecting, provide time to join, pull apart and rejoin.
- For transporting, add a sturdy basket or wagon so pieces and constructions can move between places.
- For orientation, explore building sideways, upside down or from different viewpoints.



Movement and Physical Development

- Grip, lift, rotate and position the pieces, using two hands together as constructions become more ambitious.
- Build at floor level, on a low table or at standing height to change the movements and body control involved.
- Experiment and roll the pieces. Which have curved or straight edges? Which travel smoothly, wobble, or spin? Add a simple ramp so children can begin exploring movement.
- Can they build a vehicle or creation that moves? Can it roll, rock, spin or be carefully carried without coming apart?

Communication and Language

- Introduce useful words in context: connect, separate, balance, curve, edge, base, stable, wobble, attract and repel.
- Offer a simple verbal or picture challenge when it suits the play: 'Can you find a piece that will make a strong base?'
- Build together. Taking turns to add one piece creates a natural reason to listen, negotiate and share an idea.

Early Mathematical Thinking

- Sort and group by colour, shape, texture, curved or straight edges, or the number and position of magnetic dots.
- Match pieces that are the same, then look for pairs that have similar features but are not identical. How are they similar or different?
- Build and compare towers using meaningful language: taller, shorter, wider, narrower, more, and fewer. Who can build the tallest or strongest tower? Can the children use one of the magnetic pieces to make it wobble or fall over?
- Count pieces as part of the play, without making counting the price of joining in.
- Create repeating arrangements or patterns, then leave space for children to continue, alter or dismantle them. Alternatively, explore symmetry by building on a mirrored table, mirrored tuff tray insert or by placing matching pieces on either side of an imaginary line.



Exploration and Scientific Thinking

- Let children discover that the magnetic dots do not always behave in the same way. Test which faces connect (attract) and which push away (repel). Older children might predict first, then change their thinking after testing.
- Investigate stability with different base pieces. What makes a tower stand, lean, twist or topple?
- Add a small collection of safe, everyday materials. Which are attracted to the magnets? Risk assess to check the items used are safe.

Creative Construction and Design

- Stack, balance and connect in any direction. Resist straightening or 'fixing' a structure that is still being worked out.
- Build tall, wide, low, curved or overhanging. Which shapes create new possibilities?
- Make bridges, towers, enclosures, arches or abstract sculptures, following children's emerging ideas rather than a model to copy.
- Combine the shapes with wooden blocks, tubes, fabric, baskets or other open-ended materials to extend scale and complexity.
- Photograph a child's construction if they want to revisit it. Can they rebuild it, adapt it or use the photograph as a starting point?

Imagination and Storytelling

- A shape can be anything: a wheel, a cake, a mountain, a control button, a character or something without a name at all.
- Add a few familiar figures or animals only when this supports an existing interest. The shapes might become homes, vehicles, landscapes, props or characters.
- Create a character from connected pieces. What is it like? Where might it go? Let the story grow from the child's construction.

