

10 SHOPPING DAYS LEFT

## WHAT TO BUY

# TINY TOTS



► We mentioned that buying a baby a sleeper for his or her first Christmas was no fun. But that doesn't change the fact that: A.) It's really, really cold right now, and B.) There are some really cute sleepers to choose from. **Carter's Easy Entry Sleep & Play one-piece sleepers** (beginning at \$7.98, *Macy's*) come in all sizes and materials, and are perfect for a good night's sleep or for simply lounging around the home. And if there's a spit-up or accident, sleepers are usually the fastest, best answer for the baby's change of clothes.

► It's a cliché used in television commercials and sitcoms, where the baby's turning a fake steering wheel while his or her parent is actually driving the car.

The **VTech Around Town Baby Driver** (\$14.50, *Walmart*), for ages 6 months to 12 months, puts baby in the play-time driver's seat. Baby can weave through traffic, throw it into reverse, and slam on the horn just like mom or dad. The toy comes equipped with a soft wheel, twinkling traffic light, and fun melodies for the child.

► It's hard to stroll down any toy aisle without seeing Fisher Price products in large quantities.

But **Fisher Price's Laugh & Learn Learning Home** (\$74.99, *Toys 'R Us*) leads our list. Recommended for children ages 6 months to 36 months, this clever gadget teaches letters, numbers, shapes, and colors, among other things. The touch of a button or pull of a lever brings about a silly noise or song that delights the child and brings a smile to Mom and Dad's face. With dimensions of 29 inches by 31 inches by 23 inches, the Learning Home takes up its share of space, but earns the real estate through its value to the child.

► For the little drummer boy (or girl) in the family, the **LeapFrog Learn & Groove Alphabet Drum** (\$17.00, *Meijer*) is the perfect toy. The child taps the drum to develop motor skills, learn the alphabet, and enjoy the dance-along music each tap can elicit. Like many of the other educational toys out there, the Drum has a bilingual feature in which it offers the alphabet in English and Spanish.

▲ **Fisher Price's Laugh & Learn Friends Musical Table** (\$34.00, *Meijer*). The Musical Table, for ages 6 months to 36 months, is four corners of shapes, smiley faces, and push buttons that play songs. Some of the songs are sung in English and Spanish, offering another educational tool as the baby becomes a toddler.

Gift ideas: Joe Vardon

◀ Whether it's for a proud mother or father, or even for the baby to show his or her own children years down the road, a **Baby's First Christmas Keepsake Ornament** (\$16.95, *Werner's Hallmark*) is an obvious choice. Hallmark offers many commemorative items for a baby's first Christmas, from a ceramic rattle, to a photo frame, and more. The problem is, you'd better act fast if you haven't purchased one already. Supplies are nearly gone and no new shipments are expected for 2010.

▼ A visual and auditory delight, **Playskool's Explore 'N Grow Busy Ball Popper** (\$15.99, *Kmart*) will keep your child laughing for months. Listed for children ages 9 months and up, boys and girls even younger may laugh and stare in amazement as the toy shoots bright colored balls into the air and plays music. And as the child grows older, he or she will enjoy retrieving the balls and putting them back into the popper for more fun.

◀ For the aspiring slugger, hoopster, or football star, the **Little Tikes Little Champs 3-in-1 Sports Center** (\$19.99, *Toys 'R Us*) offers babies perhaps their first foray into sports. Equipped with two basketballs and a soft bat, children ages 9 months and up can develop motor skills and coordination with the football, baseball, and basketball activities the Sports Center offers. Each time baby puts a ball through the hoop, for instance, the crowd may roar, the buzzer may sound, or a sports-themed song may play.

▼ **The Learning Kitchen**, (\$34.99, *Toys 'R Us*) for ages 6 months to 36 months, also teaches in English and Spanish. It can be set up in the real kitchen, so as Mom or Dad cooks the chicken and potatoes, baby can "cook" too while playing and learning with toy kitchen tools.

▲ For the boy or girl who's learning to walk, the **Playskool Step Start Walk 'N Ride** (\$15.99, *Kmart*) is really two Christmas presents in one. First, the Walk 'N Ride serves as a walker to help the baby gain balance and strength as he or she learns to walk. Later, the toy can be converted to a ride-on toy equipped with a gearshift, spinning drum, flexible antenna, and other features.