

Kids & computers: Look for the right fit

Is a home computer on your children's wish list this year? If so, one of your goals should be to select good educational software (programming) once you've purchased the hardware (terminal).

Here are some guidelines for evaluating educational software from Elaine Glasser, home economist from the Cooperative Extension Service of Oakland County:

- Be sure the program is appropriate for the age of the child. While older children may want complicated graphics, they may overwhelm a young child. Does the program make good use of the computer's abilities with graphics, movement, sound and color? The computer has the capability of being much more than a static book on a screen.

- Does the program have different skill levels that lets the child progress? If not, you may find the child can master it very quickly and then be bored.

- Can you delete or add information to make the program more personal? Spelling programs may allow words to be added so that it teaches what the child needs. The same goes for math skills.

- Can the child direct the pace of learning? Or do screens of information

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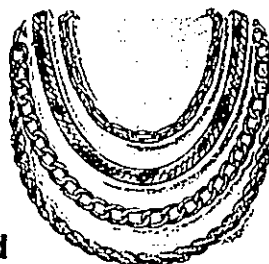
move at a predetermined pace they may be too fast or too slow for that child?

- Does the documentation that comes with the program suggest other activities that can be used as a followup? Does it include illustrative examples or sample screens that help the first time through?

- Does the program handle errors well? Children may not always find a keyboard easy to use in the beginning. What happens when an incorrect response is made? Does the program help you give a correct response, or does it stop with no directions?

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