

Terrific Toddlerhood

Whatever happened to that baby of yours? Welcome to the wonderful years of toddlerhood!

“I do it!” - The Age of Independence

If you are a parent of a toddler, you probably often hear the words, “I do it!” Toddlers (one to three years old) are learning about their abilities and defining themselves as separate, independent beings. It is normal for children this age to:

- have difficulty coping with changes in their routine
- assert themselves and say “no” often
- get angry and rebel at times
- want to make choices for themselves
- try out their newfound independence, yet still want to feel safe and secure
- test boundaries to see how much they can say or do

Children this age still need strong parental support. As a parent, you can help your child during this exciting, yet oftentimes trying, stage.

- ◆ Let your toddler know when a change is about to occur. The advance warning should be based on concrete events, e.g. “It will be bedtime *after* your bath. Let’s get your pajamas ready.” This is better than saying, “bedtime will be in *an hour*”, since toddlers do not have a clear concept of time.
- ◆ Now that your child is walking, s/he will be able to get into more. Set up your home so that your toddler can explore safely and feel successful. It may be a good time to put away breakable objects within reach. Set up your home so your toddler is less likely to get hurt and you are not always saying “No, don’t touch that!”
- ◆ Create silly games where it is okay for your child to practice saying “NO!” For example, ask your toddler, “Does the cat say ‘woof’?” or “Do we eat flowers?”
- ◆ Make sure your child has a space to play freely and run each day. Have fun! Set up a pile of pillows or cushions to climb over, or create a cardboard tunnel for your toddler to crawl through out of an old box.



- ◆ Provide choices to your toddler whenever possible. When getting him/her dressed say, “Do you want to wear your green shirt, or your blue shirt? Letting them decide on some matters will make them feel powerful, and reduce conflict. In many circumstances, there is no choice. If you **have to** go food shopping, rather than *asking* your toddler, “Do you want to come shopping?”, say, “We are going to the supermarket. Let’s put your shoes on now.” If your toddler refuses, pick him up and carry him. Avoid threatening to leave him alone. This can be very frightening for young children.



Learning about and Expressing Feelings



Oftentimes, toddlers throw tantrums or lash out because they feel frustrated and don’t know how to communicate their feelings. They may bite others when angry or are in pain from teething. Parents can teach them how to express themselves and handle problems appropriately.

- Label feelings so children will learn how to talk about what they are experiencing, e.g., “I know you are **sad** because dad left, but he’ll be back after your nap.”
- Toddlers are self-centered and they can’t understand the difference between their feelings and others’ feelings. You can still start teaching them empathy. Say, “It is wrong to bite people. Ted is crying because you hurt him. Say sorry to Ted.” Or, “If your teeth hurt, bite this teething ring, not your friend.” Use simpler language with younger toddlers: “No biting. Biting hurts.”
- Teach your child words to help him resolve conflict. Say, “I know you are **angry** at Sam for taking your toy, but it is not OK to hit. Tell Sam, ‘I was using that toy.’”
- Read your toddler books that depict characters with various feelings, such as happiness, sadness, fear, anger, etc. This will teach them vocabulary to use when expressing their own feelings.

Turn the page for more information on terrific toddlers!



Terrific Toddlerhood...continued



"There's a monster in my closet!" - Conquering Fears

The world can seem scary to toddlers because there are many things they do not yet understand. They do not know you will be back "soon" since they do not have a clear concept of time. They may believe the monsters in their nightmares will "get them" because they do not know the difference between what is real, and what is not. They may become scared when bath water goes down the drain; they may think they will go down with it, since they can not yet grasp concepts of space. You can ease these fears and help your child feel safe.

■ Comfort children when they get hurt. A Bandaid may not be necessary, but could help your child feel better.

■ Comfort children after a nightmare. Listen to what the nightmare was about. Explain that it was not real.

■ Tell them that there are no monsters in their room. If you go "looking" for monsters, it sends the harmful message that you believe monsters exist.

■ Make adjustments, such as taking them out of the tub before you pull the drain stopper or using a night light if they are afraid of the dark. Let them know that you understand how they feel.

■ Toddlers often go through separation anxiety, much as babies do, when their parents leave them. Letting your child hold comfort items, such as his security blanket, during this time may be helpful. Always say goodbye when you are leaving. Tell your child, "Mommy has to go to work now, but I will be back after you wake up from your nap today."

■ Most toddlers will grow out of their fears with support and understanding from their parents or caregivers. However, if your child's fears are greatly interfering with his/her life, talk it over with the pediatrician.



Testing Limits & Discipline

It is natural for toddlers to test limits as they learn self-control. Parents can teach them appropriate behavior.

❖ Help toddlers reflect on their behavior while teaching them the desired behavior. Say, "You spilled your juice because you weren't sitting. Help me clean it up." Later say, "Nice job sitting down and drinking your juice."

❖ Focus on the behavior, not the child. Saying, "I know you like to play with your friends, but I can not let you hurt them" is more effective than, "Bad girl!"

❖ Remain positive. Instead of, "Don't slam the door!", try, "I know you can close the door quietly." Then praise: "Good job closing the door quietly."

❖ Be consistent so your toddler develops a clear sense of what the rules are. Make sure the rules are realistic and simple, e.g. "You need to pick up your toys when you are finished playing so we don't trip on them."

❖ Consequences for broken rules should be short-term and related to the "crime." Toddlers would not understand missing a trip to the park tomorrow for not picking up their toys today. A better consequence would be to remove the toys for a short time.

❖ Children feel negative attention is better than none at all, so they may act out if they don't receive positive reinforcement. Tell your children what you like about them often and praise their good deeds.

Staying Safe and Healthy

☼ Talk to the pediatrician about necessary immunizations and check-ups. Since your toddler has sprung some teeth, a trip to the dentist may be in order.

☼ Toddlers need to be supervised while eating, in the tub, and playing. Cut food into small pieces and avoid feeding toddlers popcorn, peanuts, hot dogs cut into round chunks, or other chokable foods. Remove small objects that are within your child's reach, such as coins, pen caps, etc. It may be helpful to take an Infant/Child CPR and Safety course at your local American Red Cross.

☼ Make sure your child's toys are age appropriate and do not have small pieces that can be swallowed. Check www.cpsc.gov or www.safechild.net to see if any of your child's toys or clothes have been recalled.

☼ Empty buckets of water immediately after cleaning. Install safety latches on toilets and cabinets containing dangerous items such as medicines & cleaners.

☼ Check to make sure your child's car seat is installed properly. Visit www.safekids.org for more information.

☼ As a parent, it is important for you to take care of yourself! Carve out some "alone time." Ask for support during stressful times.

Parent Stress Line: 1-800-632-8188

Parents Helping Parents: 1-800-882-1250