



# Parent Handbook

12 - 36 months

---



## Table of Contents

### Chapter 1 Health

- Keeping yourself healthy
- Keeping your toddler healthy
  - Preventing illness
  - Managing illness

### Chapter 2 Safety

- General safety tips
- Basic safety at home
- Basic safety out and about

### Chapter 3 Daily Toddler Care

- Nutrition
- Sleep

### Chapter 4 Development

- Introduction to early brain development
- Cognitive development
- Social-emotional development
- Language development
- Physical development
- Activities to promote development
- Developmental challenges and delays

### Chapter 5 Shaping Toddler Behavior

- Shaping toddler behavior
- Managing specific behavioral challenges

# Welcome!

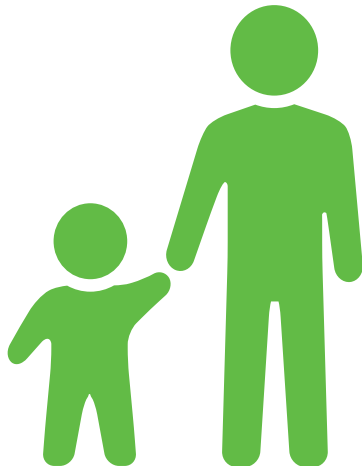
Between birth and age 3, your child will grow and develop more dramatically than during any other stage of life.

Please refer to the [Parent Handbook \(prenatal-12 months\)](#) to learn tips to promote your child's development from birth through their first birthday.

This Parent Handbook (12-36 months) discusses ways that you can guide the healthy development of your 1 to 3 year old child, including

- Making sure your child gets regular health care, immunizations, and healthy nutrition
- Providing a safe and stimulating environment
- Nurturing and interacting in special ways to meet your toddler's needs and encourage healthy development

Research shows that growth and learning in the first three years make a difference for success in school and throughout the rest of your child's life. You are your child's first and most important teacher, and your support and guidance will play a pivotal role in your child's future.



## Chapter 1 Health

---

- Keeping yourself healthy
- Keeping your toddler healthy
  - » Preventing illness
  - » Managing illness

**Get all these tips and more, targeted to the age of your child, sent right to your cell phone for free 2-5 times a week.**



[brightbytext.org](http://brightbytext.org)

Your information will never be sold or used for advertising. Msg & data rates apply. Text STOP to 274448 to stop. Text HELP to 274448 for help.

## Keeping yourself healthy

Parenting is joyful but also challenging. Remember that taking care of yourself allows you to take the best possible care of your toddler. Tips to help you keep yourself healthy while raising a young child

- Make some time to continue doing a few of the things that you enjoy even with all of the new changes and priorities.
- Know your own limits.
  - » Ask for help from your partner or trusted friends/family when you need it.
  - » Be specific with your “asks”, like saying, “Can you run to the store and get milk for me?” or “Can you look after my child so I can take a nap?”
- Understand that your relationships will change with a child.
  - » Communicate clearly and positively.
  - » Handle frustration in a way that does not stress the people around you.
- Work as a team with your partner or spouse.
  - » Put aside individual goals for awhile.
  - » Agree to disagree sometimes.
  - » Someone doesn’t always have to “win” a disagreement.
  - » Share responsibilities whenever possible.
- Create friendships with other experienced parents. Talk with them frequently to keep a helpful perspective.



## Keeping your toddler healthy

In a famous quote, Benjamin Franklin stated, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Preventing illness and injury is the primary goal for many parents of young children. While it’s impossible for parents to eliminate all sickness from their toddlers’ lives, you can play a large role in limiting your child’s exposure to infections and other hazards that are prone to making children sick.

### Preventing illness

#### Handwashing

Germs (typically from viruses or bacteria) cause the majority of early childhood illnesses. Handwashing is the first line of defense against germs. You can support wellness in your home easily through the simple task of regular handwashing. Ask your family and household visitors to wash their hands every time they come into the house.

Germs can be spread in many ways, including

- Touching dirty hands or dirty surfaces like shopping carts, door handles, or toilet seats
- Changing dirty diapers
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- Touching or breathing in the germs from a cough or a sneeze

Your child can become infected with germs without even knowing it by using dirty hands to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. Although it’s impossible to keep hands germ-free, washing hands frequently can help cut down on the transfer of bacteria, viruses, and other germs.

Always wash hands before

- Preparing food or eating
- Treating wounds or giving medicine
- Touching a sick or injured person

Always wash hands after

- Preparing food, especially raw meat or poultry
- Using the toilet or changing a diaper
- Touching an animal or animal toys, leashes, or waste
- Blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing into your hands
- Treating wounds
- Touching a sick or injured person
- Handling garbage or something that could be contaminated



## Avoiding unhealthy exposures

Growing up in safe environments helps to prevent the development of illness and disease. Secondhand and thirdhand smoke pose some of the biggest environmental risks to children. Toddlers can't choose their environment and depend on you to provide safe and healthy air to breathe.



### What is secondhand smoke and why is it dangerous?

Secondhand smoke is the smoke that comes from the tip of a lit smoking device or the smoke that a smoker breathes out when smoking.

Secondhand smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals and over 60 of these chemicals are known to cause cancer.

Children who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to develop

- Ear infections
- Allergies
- Lung problems (i.e. bronchitis, pneumonia, and more severe asthma)

It's safest to keep your child's environment smoke-free. Make your car and home non-smoking zones.

For more information on protecting your child from secondhand smoke, go to [HealthyChildren.org](http://HealthyChildren.org) and view the smoking section under health issues.

## What is thirdhand smoke and why is it dangerous?

Thirdhand smoke is the toxic stuff that is left behind long after a cigarette is put out. The dangerous gases and small particles from cigarette smoke land on and stick to every surface they come in contact with, like the smoker's hair, clothing, furniture, and flooring. While cruising and playing, your toddler will be exposed to the poisons on contaminated surfaces- like their toys. Third-hand smoke is a serious health risk for kids, especially for those who live in, visit, or stay at a home with smokers.

For more information on protecting your toddler from thirdhand smoke, at [Healthy Children.org](https://www.healthychildren.org).

## Thinking of quitting?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things a parent can do to protect themselves and their children.

If you are interested in quitting, talk with your healthcare provider about the safest and most effective ways to quit.

Learn more about quitting at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669) for toll-free help from anywhere, anytime at <https://smokefree.gov>

If you or others in your home are not ready to quit smoking, consider these ways to protect your child

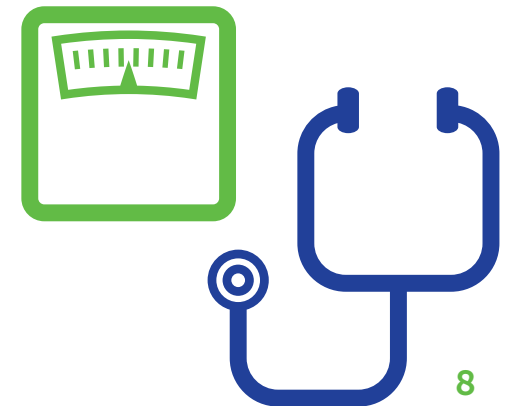
- Always step outside (and away from any children) when you smoke.
- Never smoke in your home or car.
- After smoking, change your clothes and wash your hands before touching or playing with your toddler.

## Well-child checkups

Well-child checkups help prevent childhood illness while allowing your child's healthcare provider to know your toddler and track your child's growth and development. These visits are the perfect time for you to discuss your child's height, weight, diet, activities, and sleep patterns.

- Children between 1 and 2 years of age should attend well-child checkups at 12 months, 15 months, 18 months, and 24 months.
- Children between 2 and 3 years of age are typically seen for well-child checkups at 24 months and 30 months of age. The timing of these checkups may vary by healthcare provider.

At well-child visits, your toddler's healthcare provider will use growth charts as a visual tool to follow your child's growth over time. Percentages/percentiles show where your child is growing compared to other children of the same gender (boy or girl) and at the same age. There are no "best" percentiles, but rather a range of healthy and normal growth patterns. Ask your child's healthcare provider to show you your child's growth chart at every well-child visit. Talk about the healthiest pace of growth for your child. Keep a record of your child's growth and development and make note of any changes.



Well-child checkups also give you an opportunity to ask questions about your child, so be sure to bring a list of concerns or questions to the visit. If you can, include all primary caregivers (parents/partners) in your toddler's well-child visits. When all primary caregivers are at well-child visits, everyone hears the same information and everyone has a chance to ask important questions about your child.

At well-child visits, the healthcare provider will check your toddler's physical health (e.g. reflexes, heart health, oral health, and progress in weight and height growth). The healthcare provider will also ask questions about how your toddler is tracking on developmental milestones. Parents and healthcare providers have more options for managing issues when physical and developmental problems are identified early.

## Vaccines

Besides allowing you and your child's doctor a chance to work together to track your child's growth and development, well-child visits are also opportunities for toddlers to receive shots (vaccines or immunizations) that help keep them healthy.

Children are exposed to lots of germs, including bacteria and viruses. Little bodies need protection from illness.

The vaccine schedule from your child's healthcare provider is designed to protect your toddler when children are most likely to get seriously ill from a vaccine-preventable disease. With this schedule, your child is protected against multiple severe diseases by the age of 2. In addition to protecting your child's health, vaccines are a gift of good health to those around you. By protecting your toddler's health with shots, you also protect your family, friends, neighbors, people who are more likely to get sick (such as newborns and grandparents) and other people in danger of serious illness.



## What are childhood vaccines protecting your child from?

- **DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis) vaccine:** protects against diphtheria, tetanus (lockjaw), and pertussis (severe respiratory disease/whooping cough)
- **Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccines:** protect against serious liver disease
- **Hib (Haemophilus influenza) vaccine:** protects against a type of meningitis
- **HPV (human papillomavirus virus) vaccine:** protects against viral infections of the mouth, throat, and genitals
- **Influenza vaccine:** protects against a viral infection that causes high fevers, coughing, muscle aches, and other symptoms that are especially dangerous for infants and the elderly population
- **Meningococcal vaccine:** protects against meningitis and serious blood infections
- **MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine:** protects against measles, mumps, and rubella (viral infections with multiple severe consequences)
- **Pneumococcal vaccine:** protects against meningitis and serious blood infections
- **Polio vaccine:** protects against a severe viral infection that causes paralysis
- **Rotavirus vaccine:** protects against a diarrheal infection that can be severe in young children
- **Varicella vaccine:** protects against chickenpox and the disease's severe complications

See this link at the Center for Disease Control for the current immunization schedule <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines>

### Side effects of vaccines

Severe reactions to vaccines are very rare. Mild reactions to vaccines do occur, but they do not last long. There may be some swelling, redness, and discomfort where the shot was given. Your child may experience a low-grade fever or fussiness after getting vaccinations. Most side effects are minor and temporary. If you are ever concerned about your child's health or vaccine schedule, call your child's healthcare provider for advice.

### Where can my child get vaccines?

Your child's healthcare provider should have all the vaccines your toddler needs. There are also health clinics that offer low-cost vaccinations. To find the clinic nearest you, call (1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)) or visit Center for Disease Control at <https://www.cdc.gov/features/vfcprogram/>

### My child missed some vaccines. Now what?

Vaccinations protect your child's health. Let your child's healthcare provider know that your child has missed some vaccines and they will help you get back on track.

### I need help paying for my child's vaccines.

A federal program called Vaccines for Children (VFC) provides vaccines to eligible children, including those without health insurance, those enrolled in Medicaid, and those whose health insurance doesn't cover vaccines. For more information about the VFC program call 800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).

### Ouch! What can I do to comfort my toddler during shots?

Getting shots can be scary for you and for your toddler. Parents can make shots less stressful with a few helpful actions.

- Read up on vaccine information from a reliable source before your child's visit. This gives you the opportunity to get any questions answered by your child's healthcare provider.
- Bring immunization record to help your child's healthcare provider plan for vaccines. This is especially important if your child has received vaccines at multiple locations.

- Help to calm your child.
  - » Before the shot, relax and stay calm. Toddlers can pick up on your stress and get scared.
  - » During the shots, hug your child and provide distraction by singing, storytelling, touching, and smiling.
  - » After the shots, hold and talk lovingly to your child. Let your toddler know that you're proud of them for getting their vaccines and you're happy that the vaccines will help keep your child healthy.

### Vaccines are safe

The United States currently has the safest, most effective vaccines in history. Vaccines are tested for years before they can be used by doctors. Once they are being used, vaccines are continuously monitored for safety. If you ever have any questions about vaccines, ask your healthcare provider or visit a trusted website like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at [cdc.gov/vaccines](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines).

### Is it safe to give so many vaccines so soon?

Yes. The vaccine schedule is designed to protect your child when children are most likely to get sick from a vaccine-preventable disease. If you vaccinate your toddler on time, your child is less likely to get a potentially deadly disease that could have been prevented with a simple shot. Talk to your child's healthcare provider if you have any concerns.

### Vaccines do not cause autism

Some parents are concerned that thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative contained in the influenza vaccine, causes autism. Autism is a brain-development disorder that impairs social interaction and communication. While we don't know exactly what causes autism, multiple research studies have shown that autism is not caused by vaccines.



## Vision health

It is important to make sure your child's vision is being tested as part of well-child checkups or whenever you think there may be a vision problem. In a small percentage of children, vision develops abnormally. Vision screening should begin in the newborn period and continue throughout childhood. Early detection of vision problems allows for earlier treatment, which can improve long-term outcomes. If your child has not had a recent vision screening, ask your child's healthcare provider whether your child needs an eye exam at the next well-child checkup. Visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) and search for vision for more information on vision development and vision screenings.



### Tips for telling if your child has vision problems

Your child is too young to recognize vision issues, so you have to watch your toddler for signs of visual trouble. Contact your child's healthcare provider if your child

- Complains of eye pain or discomfort
- Needs you to hold books very close for reading
- Avoids close, near-vision activity, like scribbling
- Tilts their head to see better (such as while looking at a picture)
- Rubs their eyes when not sleepy
- Avoids distance-vision activities, like watching birds or planes
- Seems overly sensitive to light
- Seems especially clumsy
- Closes one eye to see better (such as while looking at a book)



- Develops changes or abnormalities in the appearance of the eyes
  - » Has a droopy eyelid that won't ever fully open
  - » Has white, grayish-white, or yellow-colored material in the pupil
  - » Has pus or crust in either eye
  - » Squints often
  - » Looks cross-eyed (or their eyes don't appear to work together)
  - » Has eye redness that doesn't go away in a few days
  - » Has any other change in the appearance of the eyes

## Hearing health

Hearing problems are the leading cause of delayed language development. Delays in language development can result in many other serious learning delays. Therefore, it is essential to diagnose and treat childhood hearing problems as early as possible.

During the toddler years, signs of hearing problems can include

- Your child has speech delays.
- Your child is failing to respond to questions on a regular basis especially when you are talking from another room.
- Your child seems to hear some sounds (high or low-pitched sounds) better than others.
- Your child wants the volume louder than other listeners when enjoying music or audio programming.





Parents or other family members are often the first to recognize a child's hearing difficulties. If you have any concerns about your child's hearing, talk to your child's healthcare provider. You know your child best, so trust your instincts and seek help if you think there may be a problem.

All children develop at their own pace; however, there are a few milestones that are helpful when considering whether or not your child might have a hearing problem.

**Here are some signs that your child's hearing is developing normally.**

#### **Up to 15 months**

- Your child's voice goes up and down when making sounds.
- Your child turns toward a soft noisemaker.
- Your child responds to their name.
- Your child is making sounds like "mama" or "dada."
- Your child takes turns "talking" with you, taking breaks while you talk and then responding with babbling sounds or words.
- Your child often responds to music by "singing" along or bouncing when listening.

#### **15 months to 2 years**

- Your child imitates words others say.
- Your child begins saying at least two words other than "mama" and "dada" and learns about 1 new word a week between the ages of 1 ½ and 2.
- Your child begins to follow simple commands, such as "get the ball."

#### **At age 2**

- Your child can speak 50-100 words.
- Your child can say a few two-word phrases.
- Your child is understood by others about half the time.

#### **At age 3**

- Your child can name most things they encounter on a regular basis.
- Your child can speak in 2-3 word sentences.
- Your child's speech is understood by strangers three-quarters (75%) of the time.

If you have concerns about your child's hearing or language development, contact your child's healthcare provider for an examination and/or a hearing screening. Keep in mind that ear infections can cause temporary hearing loss and frequent or chronic ear infections can lead to more permanent damage.

Check out [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) for more information on language development and delays.

#### **Hearing and ear infections**

Ear infections are common in early childhood. Children with ear infections may have trouble hearing due to fluid build-up behind the eardrum. Children with ear infections may also have

- Cold symptoms (ear infections often start with a cold)
- Fussiness (due to ear pain)
- Disturbed sleep (waking up during the night, unwillingness to lie flat, or having trouble sleeping)
- Fever (usually low grade (101° to 102° F) — although a fever isn't always present)
- Ear drainage

Ear infections are detected with a special instrument that allows your child's healthcare provider to look at your toddler's eardrum. Make sure to take your child to their healthcare provider if you suspect an ear infection. A careful examination of your child's inner ear is the best way to determine the best next steps to help your child feel better.

### Help children avoid ear infections

- Teach kids to stop the spread of germs. Handwashing can lower the risk of spreading infection.
- Prevent secondhand smoke exposure. Smoke exposure is linked to higher rates of ear infections in children.
- Keep kids up to date with their shots. Several routine childhood vaccines help prevent the diseases that cause ear infections.

## Dental (oral) health

Starting your child off with good oral health care is important. Primary teeth or baby teeth are a person's first set of teeth. Baby teeth begin to develop before birth and typically begin to push through the gums at 5 to 7 months of age (sometimes earlier or later). By 2 to 3 years of age, your child should have all 20 baby teeth.

Your child's baby teeth are very important. They help your child eat and speak. These teeth also save space for the permanent teeth, which begin to come in at around 5 to 6 years of age.

Thorough cleaning of teeth is the single most important way to prevent teeth and gum infections like dental caries (cavities), periodontitis, and gingivitis. Cavities can spread from baby teeth to adult teeth. That's why daily care of your child's baby teeth is very important.

### What are "dental caries?"

Dental caries, often referred to as cavities or tooth decay, are the most common chronic disease among children in the United States. Young children with tooth decay can experience pain and develop problems with eating and speaking.

Parents can help toddlers avoid dental disease by following a few tips.

#### 1. Brush your toddler's teeth

Once the first tooth starts to show (usually after 6 months but can be up to 12 months for some children), brush your child's teeth daily in the morning and before bedtime. This will help prevent tooth decay.

How do I brush my child's teeth?

- Moisten the bristles of a soft-bristled toothbrush with water.
- Apply a smear of fluoride toothpaste to the bristles. The smear should not be bigger than a grain of rice for children under age three. Remind your child to spit out and not swallow the toothpaste after brushing.
- Place the head of the toothbrush at an angle toward the gumline.
- Use short back-and-forth strokes.
- Brush the outside (cheek side) of the teeth first, brushing two teeth at a time. Brush the top teeth, then the bottom teeth.
- Brush the inside (tongue side) of the teeth the same way. When brushing the inside of the front teeth, hold



the toothbrush up and down and use the front tip of the brush.

- Brush the chewing surface of the teeth going back and forth gently.
- Brush the tongue, scrubbing gently down and out.
- Brush for at least two minutes.

## 2. Schedule your child's first dental visit

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend that your child visit a dentist by their first birthday, or when the first tooth comes in. After the first visit, children should continue dental visits every six months. If you need to find a dentist for your child, or don't have dental insurance find information at America's Pediatric Dentists [www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org) or Insure Kids Now [www.insurekidsnow.gov](http://www.insurekidsnow.gov)

## 3. Choose healthy foods and drinks

- Give your child only water to drink between meals and at bedtime. Drinking juice, soda, sports drinks, milk, or flavored water increases the risk of cavities. Sugar fuels bacteria that cause tooth decay.
- Give your child healthy snacks between meals (like vegetables, fruits, or cheese).
- Avoid sweet, sticky snacks like candy, cookies, fruit roll-ups, and sugary cereal because these cause tooth decay.
- Plan a limited number of snack times each day. The more often you give your toddler snacks and sugary drinks, the more likely your child is to develop tooth decay.



4. **Check to make sure your local water supply contains fluoride.** Fluoride is added to the drinking water in most cities and towns. If your water supply does not contain fluoride, ask your child's healthcare provider or dentist if you need to get your child a prescription for fluoride drops or chewable tablets.

## 5. Avoid spreading dental disease

- Keep your own mouth healthy. Parents should see a dentist regularly to keep their mouths clean and limit the cavity-causing bacteria in their mouths which can easily transfer to children. Dental disease is almost 100% preventable and studies show that parents who have healthier mouths have a lower chance of passing cavity-causing germs along to their children. Make regular trips to the dentist as a family.
- Avoid sharing utensils or food or licking your child's pacifiers. Limiting these activities helps reduce the



chances that you'll give your toddler the bacteria that cause tooth decay.

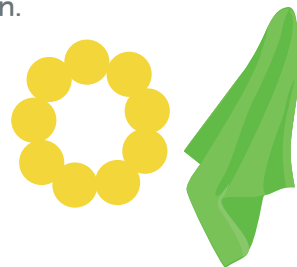
### Managing teething

Expect that teething may cause your child some discomfort and lead to behaviors to reduce pain (e.g. chewing on fingers or toys). Many children experience no symptoms when teething. Others may experience

- Drooling
- Swollen and/or sensitive gums
- Mild irritability or fussiness
- Crying
- Biting behavior
- Eating or sleeping changes
- Low-grade fever (under 101° F)

### Comfort your child if you suspect teething pain

- Give your child something safe to chew on, such as a teething ring or a wet washcloth cooled in the refrigerator.
- Soothe sore gums by giving cold foods such as applesauce or yogurt.
- Avoid topical pain medicines that are available to rub on your child's gums. These topical pain relievers can be dangerous to your toddler.
- Call your child's healthcare provider if your child seems to be having unusual or inconsolable pain.



## Managing illness

### Taking your child's temperature

A fever is a rise in body temperature above the normal range. Fevers typically indicate that your child is experiencing an illness. To measure your child's temperature, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends digital thermometers only. While you often can tell if your child is warmer than usual by feeling a toddler's forehead, only a thermometer can tell how high the temperature is.

Thermometers can be used to take your child's temperature from different parts of their body including: rectal (in the bottom), oral (in the mouth), axillary (under the arm), temporal artery (across the forehead and only for children 3 months and older), or tympanic (in the ear and only for children 6 months and older). Ask your child's healthcare provider which temperature-taking method they prefer you use to check your child's temperature at home. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends use of digital thermometers and that mercury thermometers should no longer be used due to risks for toxicity if the thermometer breaks. Ask your medical provider how to safely dispose of old mercury thermometers.

Keep these additional temperature-taking tips in mind.

- Do not take a child's temperature right after a bath or if your child has been bundled tightly for a while because this can affect the temperature reading.
- Never leave a child unattended with a thermometer or while taking a temperature.

### When to contact your healthcare provider

Many common illnesses will get better on their own but some require the attention of a healthcare provider. If you are concerned that something is wrong with your child, don't hesitate to call your child's healthcare provider. You know your toddler best.

Be sure to contact your child's healthcare provider if your child has\*

- Fever of 102°F or above
- Fever lasting 2 or more days
- Excessive sleepiness or overall lack of energy, confusion, or other odd change in behavior
- Signs of dehydration (high fever, fewer wet diapers, crying without tears)
- Refusal to eat or drink
- Trouble keeping any clear liquids down
- Coughing or throwing up blood
- Diarrhea or vomiting for 12 hours or more
- Bloody diarrhea
- Difficulty swallowing
- Pain with urination or blood in the urine
- Trouble breathing
- Coughing that lasts more than two weeks or is gets worse after three to five days
- Liquid, pus, or blood coming out of the ears
- Difficulty touching their chin to their chest (stiff neck)
- Skin rash that looks like a bruise or a red rash that does not turn white when you push on the red-colored skin
- Bleeding that will not stop
- Seizure activity

\*This is not meant to be medical advice. When in doubt, call your child's healthcare provider.

It is important to keep the phone number for your child's healthcare provider in your phone or near your landline. Know the address and directions to your healthcare provider's office and to the closest hospital emergency room. Know which hospitals take your health insurance or how to get financial assistance if you need it. Of course, in the case of an immediate or life-threatening emergency, call 911.

## Chapter 2

# Safety

---

- General safety tips
- Basic safety at home
- Basic safety out and about

**Stress falls. Confidence rises.  
For you and your child.**



[brightbytext.org](http://brightbytext.org)

Message and data rates may apply. Text STOP to 274448 to stop. Text HELP to 274448 for help.

## General safety tips

Injuries are the leading cause of death for children younger than 4 in the United States. Your daring toddler has little or no judgment about safety. It's up to you to make sure that your child can explore in safe surroundings.

Many injuries can be prevented. Your toddler will be very active and will investigate everything within reach. Often, injuries happen because parents are not aware of their toddler's new skills in walking, running, jumping, and climbing.

Instead of creating an environment where everything is off-limits to your child, follow these basic tips.

- Provide open and safe spaces in your home (and outdoors) for your toddler to move and explore.
- Leave items that are safe for your toddler within your child's reach.
- Secure appliances (and their cords) and heavy furniture. Safety latches and furniture anchors can be purchased at your local hardware or baby supply store.
- Put wraps on window blinds cords to prevent strangling.
- Cover all electrical outlets.
- Eliminate unsupervised access to potentially unsafe areas such as driveways and pools.
- Put special, breakable, dangerous, or poisonous items out of your child's reach.
  - » Keep potted plants out of reach (or do not have any at all). Many plants can make your child ill if ingested.
  - » Keep jewelry, coins, batteries, small magnets and other shiny objects out of reach.
  - » Keep medications and other dangerous substances (including tobacco and alcohol) out of reach.
  - » Keep all tools and other hazardous equipment out of reach.

- » Keep fans, paper shredders, and other small appliances out of reach and unplugged when not in use. These items can catch hair and tiny fingers.
- » Make sure home exercise equipment is locked up and off limits.
- » Keep firearms away from your child.

Remember that your child cannot yet understand danger or remember "no" while exploring.

Even when all safety precautions are taken, minor bumps and scrapes are bound to happen. Be your child's hero by keeping a basic first-aid kit not only at home, but also in your car, stroller, and diaper bag. Know how to treat bee stings, scrapes, and other injuries. Consider storing a bag of frozen peas or a flexible ice pack in the freezer to reduce pain and swelling when your toddler has bumps and falls.

When you create a safe environment (indoors and outdoors) for your child to explore, it allows you to provide more encouragement and "yes" answers to your child each day!

## Shaken Baby Syndrome

You have probably heard that you should never shake a baby. Trauma from shaking can happen to toddlers, too. Shaken Baby Syndrome is a term used to describe what can happen to a child after experiencing shaking, throwing, slamming, hitting, or jerking.

A child's head is very heavy compared to the strength of their neck muscles. Sudden motion can cause a toddler's head to move backwards and forwards rapidly. When a child's head shakes back and forth rapidly, their brain can hit against their skull and cause bruising, swelling, pressure, and bleeding in and around the brain. It is important to know that a toddler is still prone to injury and even death from being shaken.

Trauma from shaking typically occurs when an adult is angry or frustrated. It can occur when a child won't stop crying, faces challenges with toilet learning, or when a child is throwing a tantrum. Parenting support is available.

These hotlines are free. They will listen to you, answer questions, offer emergency help and direct you to local agencies that can offer more assistance.

- Child Help: 800-4-A-CHILD (800-422-4453)
- National Parent Helpline: 855.4APARENT (855.427.2736) (available 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., PST, weekdays)

Find more resources online at <https://www.childhelp.org> or <https://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/find-support>.

## Basic safety at Home

---

### Burns

Burns are a leading cause of injury for young children. Parents and caregivers can help prevent burns with the following burn prevention tips.

### Kitchen

- Find a safe place for your toddler (e.g. a playpen, crib, or buckled into a highchair near you) while you are cooking or unable to give your child your full attention. Hot liquids, grease, and hot foods all can cause serious burns.
- NEVER carry your baby and hot liquids at the same time.
- Keep toddlers away from hot oven doors and other objects that might burn your child's skin if touched.
- Use the back burners of the stove when cooking.
- Keep pot handles turned toward the center of the stove and out of a child's reach.
- Keep a protective shield over oven controls when the oven is not in use.
- Have potholders and mitts near your stove.
- Keep a lid handy to cover grease pan fires (don't use water).
- Keep children away from microwaves and test microwaved items before giving them to your child.
- Keep hot liquids (e.g. coffee or tea) off low tables and counter edges and out of your child's reach.
- Avoid tablecloths and placemats. They can be pulled down easily along with the food and drinks that are on them.
- Do not leave children unsupervised in the kitchen.



## Bathroom

- Keep all appliances away from bathtubs.
- Do not leave hot curling irons/hair irons unattended.
- Adjust your water heater to 120°F (or lower) to protect your toddler from tap water scalds.
- When filling a tub, always add lukewarm water first and then warm with additional water as needed.
- Always check the temperature of the bath water before you let your child climb in.
- Do not leave children unsupervised in the bathroom.

## Around the house

- Keep cigarettes, lighters, and other lighted products away from children.
- Put a child safety-approved barrier around fireplaces, wood stoves, or space heaters.
- Keep your child out of rooms where there are hot objects such as irons that may be touched and might fall on your child.
- Cover all outlets and make sure all wires and cords are insulated properly (and try to place them out of reach).
- Do not allow your child to come near potentially explosive items, including fireworks.

## Responding to burns

If your child gets a burn, immediately put cold water (not ice) on the burned area. Keep the burned area in cold water for a few minutes to cool it off. Then, cover the burn loosely with a dry bandage or clean cloth. Call your child's healthcare provider for advice on all burns. Call 911 for severe burns in need of immediate medical assistance.

## Fire safety

There are many steps you can take to prevent your family from being injured in a house fire.

- Install at least one smoke detector on every level of your home.
  - » Install an alarm outside of each bedroom (or any space where someone sleeps).
  - » Install an alarm near the furnace.
  - » Avoid installing alarms in the kitchen or bathrooms where they may give false alarms.
  - » Remember that smoke detectors located in the basement or main level may be difficult to hear.
  - » Test smoke detectors monthly.
  - » Dust or vacuum your smoke alarms monthly.
  - » Change alarm batteries when you change your clocks for daylight savings time or on a special holiday, such as New Years.
  - » Replace alarms every 10 years.
- Develop and practice home escape drills.
  - » Make sure there are two ways out of every sleeping area.
  - » Make sure escape windows work, and have ladders for second-story or higher levels. Plan a way to carry your child down the ladder.
  - » Name a specific meeting place where all family members know to go and be counted. A good place is by a neighbor's front sidewalk.
  - » Make sure all babysitters know your fire safety plans.

If you get caught in a fire, stay low and crawl under the heat and smoke. The air will be the most smoke-free near the floor. Get out fast. Do not go back for anything. Call 911 or the fire department from outside. If you are unable to escape the room, go to the window and shout or wave clothes to attract attention.

## Choking

Your toddler explores the world using all 5 senses including taste. This makes choking a big risk for toddlers. Make sure that all toys (and other items including food) within your toddler's reach are safe and do not present a risk for choking.

It's important to keep small objects away from curious toddlers. Get down on your child's level. Look for items hiding in your home that your child could choke on and dispose of or relocate these items. Remind older children that their toys (and foods) may be unsafe for toddlers.

Consider using a choke tube tester to help identify items that pose a choking risk for your toddler. These tubes are about the same size as a child's windpipe. Objects that fit inside the choke tube tester are choking hazards for toddlers. You can also test whether objects are choking hazards using a toilet paper tube. If the object fits inside, it is a choking hazard for your child. All choking hazards should be removed from your child's reach.

Avoid choking accidents by keeping the following items and foods away from children under age 3

- Balloons
- Button batteries
- Small balls
- Small hair clips and bows
- Magnets
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Large chunks of meat or cheese
- Hot dogs (unless cut into short strips)
- Spoonfuls of peanut butter
- Raw carrots, celery, or beans
- Raisins and other dried fruits
- Grapes (unless cut into 4 pieces)
- Hard candy
- Marshmallows

- Chewing gum
- Popcorn
- Pretzels
- Chips

Tips for avoiding choking hazards at mealtime:

- Always supervise meal time.
- Always have your child sit while eating. Eating while walking may cause choking.
- Cut food into bite-sized pieces.
- Keep a calm environment at meal and snack times. Over-excitement can cause choking.
- Do not let your child eat in a moving car. If your child chokes while you are driving, you will not be able to help.

Call 911 immediately if you are worried that your toddler is choking (unable to breathe, cry, cough, or talk).

Learn first aid and CPR (including the Heimlich Maneuver) in case of need. Contact the American Red Cross or visit [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org) to find nearby classes on First Aid and CPR.

## Poisoning

With new skills including the ability to walk and climb, your child may be curious about exploring countertops, drawers, and cabinets. Be sure your toddler is always supervised. Remember that older siblings may offer unsafe objects to your toddler.

Most poisonings are accidental and occur when a child investigates household items while parents aren't paying close attention.

Be sure to keep the following items away from kids

- Medications
- Alcohol
- Liquid nicotine
- Marijuana
- Cigarettes, lighters, matches
- Cleaning products including detergent “pods”
- Furniture polish
- Gasoline and kerosene
- Antifreeze
- Windshield wiper fluid
- Paint thinners

Tips to avoid poisonings

- Store potentially poisonous items in locked cabinets.
- Keep safety caps tightly sealed on all medicines and toxic household products and keep these items out of sight and reach.
- Keep all products in their original containers. If your toddler accidentally gets into something poisonous, healthcare providers and emergency services will need to know exactly what it is.
- Use safety latches on any cupboard doors within your toddler’s reach.
- Never store lye drain cleaners in your home.
- Don’t let your toddler play with houseplants. They can be dangerous.
- Be cautious of poisoning risks when visiting the homes of others.
- Never leave your child unattended.

If something poisonous gets into your child’s mouth, call the Poison Help Line immediately. Do not make your child vomit. Attach the Poison Help Line number to any landlines and put the number in your phone: 800-222-1222 (English and Spanish).

## Falls

Toddlers move quickly! Learning new skills (like running, jumping, and climbing) may lead to falls.

Guard against dangerous falls

- Close and lock the doors to any dangerous areas of your home.
- Use gates on stairways.
- Remove chairs or boxes next to kitchen counters, tables, or windows (toddlers can use these to climb to dangerously high places).
- Don’t position beds near upper-level windows.
- Keep window screens securely latched.
- Install window guards on upper-level windows.
- Remove sharp-edged furniture from the rooms where your child plays and sleeps. Install corner cushions on tables or fireplace hearths.
- Keep furniture and other large household items from falling on your toddler with these tips:
  - » Attach TVs to the wall (or furniture) to keep heavy items from falling on your child.
  - » Secure bookcases, dressers, mirrors, and other large items to the wall.
  - » Place tempting items (e.g. remote controls and electronic devices) away from furniture and items with a tip-over risk.

For tip-over related recalls, check the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website at <https://www.cpsc.gov/>

## Sleep safety

A safe sleep environment supports your child in getting the rest needed for healthy growth. Between the ages of 1 and 3, many children transition from a crib to a bed. Learn ways to make sleep spaces safest for toddlers.

### General tips for sleep safety

- Make sure your child's room is toddler-safe in case your child wakes and wanders.
- Use flame-retardant fabrics for all bedding and sleepwear.
- Locate the crib or bed away from windows, cords, radiators, heaters, and vents.
- Never allow children under the age of 6 to sleep on (or play on) the top bunk of a bunk bed.

## Crib safety

An unsafe crib can be dangerous for your child. Toddlers can become trapped between broken crib parts or in cribs with older, unsafe designs.

According to national safety standards, a safe crib has

- No more than  $2 \frac{3}{8}$  inches (approximately the width of a soda can) between crib slats
- No missing, loose, broken, or improperly installed screws, brackets, or other hardware on the crib or the mattress support
- A firm, snug-fitting mattress, so a child cannot get trapped between the mattress and the sides or corners of the crib
- Locking, hand-operated latches that will not release by accident on any drop sides

- No corner posts over  $\frac{1}{16}$  of an inch above the end panels (this helps to prevent a child from catching clothing and strangling on the posts)
- No cut-out areas on the headboard or footboard (to prevent a child's head from getting trapped)
- No cracked or peeling paint and no lead-based paint
- No splinters or rough edges

### Additional tips for creating a safe crib sleep space

- Keep bumper pads and large soft toys out of the crib. Your child can use them as boosts to climb out of the crib.
- Keep furniture or other hazards away from the crib. They could cause injury if your child climbs out of the crib.

## "Big Kid" bed safety

If your toddler begins climbing out of the crib, consider moving your child into a "big kid" bed. Make the transition safe.

- Start by placing the crib mattress on the floor. Your child will feel familiar with the sleep space while trying out the "big kid" sleep environment.
- If using a mattress with a frame, make sure the mattress fits snugly into bed frame. Consider using temporary siderails to prevent active sleepers from rolling out of bed.
- Remove toys and furniture from the area around the bed.
- Consider installing gates at any stairways and/or at your toddler's doorway to limit your child's ability to explore unsupervised.



## Water safety

Drowning is a leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1-4. Keep kids safe around indoor water exposure by following these tips

- Stay within an arm's length of your toddler when your child is in the bathtub or near water.
- Always keep the bathroom door closed.
- Install a hook-and-eye lock high up on the outside of the bathroom door and keep it latched when not in use.
- Empty all buckets after each use.
- Keep pet water bowls away from toddlers.
- Make sure any home or apartment doors leading to a water-containing space (pool, hot tub, spa) are self-closing and self-locking (and ideally alarmed).
- Learn CPR.
- If you can't find your child, check first in areas around your house that have water (sink, toilet, bucket, fish tanks, pools, etc.).



## Pet safety

Many toddlers are attracted to animals. Teach your child to use caution when going up to dogs or other pets. Always ask the owner of the animal if the pet is friendly and if your child may approach or touch the animal. In addition, remind children to always wash hands after petting, feeding, or handling an animal.

Check here to learn more from the Center of Disease Control about keeping toddlers safe around animals <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/specific-groups/children.html>

## Toy safety

Toys are supposed to be fun and can be an important part of a toddler's development. Unfortunately, every year many children are treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries.



Use these general guidelines when buying toys

- Follow manufacturer's age guidelines.
- Beware of choking risks. Avoid toys with small parts, sharp edges, or points.
- Check the toy's design
  - » Toys made of fabric should be labeled as flame resistant or flame retardant.
  - » Stuffed toys should be washable.
  - » All stuffed toy "eyes", "noses", and buttons should be firmly attached, so they will not come off (even if bitten).
  - » Painted toys should be covered with lead-free paint.
  - » Extremely loud toys should be avoided (they could damage your child's hearing).
  - » Toys with cords or long strings should be avoided (they could strangle a child).

Did you know that children can drown in less than 2 inches of water? NEVER leave your child alone in or near a bathtub, pail of water, wading or swimming pool, open toilet, or any other body of water.

- Always read labels to make sure a toy is right for your child's age. Even if your child is advanced compared to other children the same age, avoid toys meant for older children. Age levels for toys are determined by safety factors, not intelligence or maturity. Follow the age guidelines provided. Guidelines published by the Consumer Product Safety Commission and other groups can help you make toy-buying decisions.
- Select toys that are best for your child's age, temperament, habits, and behavior.

#### Toy Safety Tips

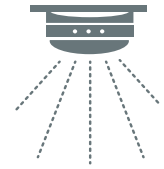
- Teach kids to put toys away. A toddler will enjoy putting smaller toys, like blocks, into a container with a hole in the lid.
- Check toys regularly to make sure they aren't broken. Make sure wooden toys haven't developed splinters or chipped paint. Make sure stuffed toys haven't developed loose parts or rips.
- Throw away broken toys or repair them right away.
- Store outdoor toys out of the rain, snow, and sun to prevent them from rusting or breaking down.
- Keep toys clean. Larger toys can be cleaned with a mixture of hot water and dish soap (always rinse and dry the toy after cleaning). Some plastic toys can be cleaned in the dishwasher. Read the manufacturer's directions to learn the safest way to clean a toy.
- If you have any doubt about a toy's safety, do not allow your child to play with it.



Check the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website at <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls> for the latest information on toy recalls.

## Carbon monoxide safety

Carbon monoxide is a gas that is odorless, tasteless, and colorless. Prevention is key to avoiding carbon monoxide poisoning which is also known as the silent killer.



Carbon monoxide can come from malfunctioning items including furnaces, wood stoves, fireplaces, and ovens. Heating your home with a kerosene heater or an open stove can also put your household at risk for carbon monoxide poisoning. Other risk factors include use of a gas generator in the home or exposure to the fumes from an idling gas-powered motor boat.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can cause your household members to develop fatigue, headaches, lightheadedness, and nausea all at the same time. Severe carbon monoxide poisoning can cause death. Children often have more severe symptoms than adults when exposed to the same level of carbon monoxide.

#### Tips for preventing carbon monoxide exposure

- Have furnaces, wood stoves, fireplaces, and ovens serviced yearly.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector on each floor of your home.
- Avoid using stoves, ovens, or outdoor heating devices (e.g. barbecue ovens) as sources of indoor heat.
- Leave the house and call your local poison control or 911 if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.

## Gun safety

About 1 in 3 homes contain a gun. Many of these weapons are stored unlocked or loaded. This puts kids at risk of being shot by themselves, by friends, or by family members. It is safest to keep guns out of the homes of children.

If you choose to keep a gun in your home, make sure it is LOCKED and UNLOADED with the ammunition stored SEPARATELY.

Ask about guns before you allow your child to explore the houses of friends, family, or neighbors. It's safest for children to live and play in homes without guns.

## Lead safety

Lead poisoning occurs when a child eats or drinks an item contaminated with lead or breathes in lead-contaminated dust or vapor.

Tips for preventing lead exposure

- Get expert advice to check your house for lead exposure if your home was built before 1978.
- Avoid scraping or sanding paint that might contain lead.
- Cover any chipping, peeling, or flaking paint that might contain lead.
- Ask your local health department whether your water contains lead.
- Change your shoes and clothes before you get home if your profession includes painting, home renovation, or potentially exposes you to lead.
- Wash your child's hands before meals.
- Ask your child's healthcare provider whether your child needs to be checked for lead exposure/lead poisoning.

Symptoms associated with lead exposure

- Headaches
- Stomach cramps
- Fatigue
- Memory loss
- High blood pressure
- Seizures

People with lead exposure may or may not appear sick. Lead poisoning can lead to severe problems for children, including learning disabilities and developmental delays.

If lead poisoning is a concern, a blood test can check for the lead level in your child's blood. Early testing and detection mean that treatment can happen before the damaging effects of lead poisoning occur.

## Basic safety out and about

### Sun safety

Ultraviolet (UV) rays, the invisible radiation waves made by the sun, can damage skin cells. Sun exposure can lead to skin cancer. People typically get 25% of their lifetime sun exposure before they turn 18 years old, so it's important for parents to take care of a child's skin from birth to protect children from future skin cancer.

Tips for protecting your toddler from sun exposure

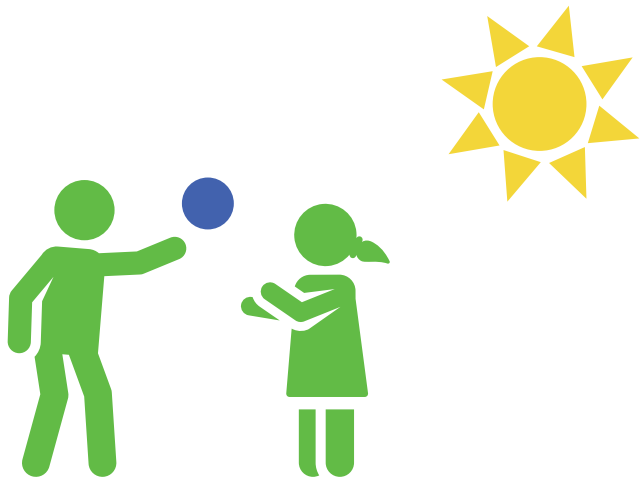
- Stay out of direct sunlight, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
  - » Use an umbrella, stroller canopy, or sun-protective tent when outside.
  - » Dress your child in a wide-brimmed hat, lightweight pants, sunglasses, and long-sleeved shirts to reduce skin exposure to UV rays.
  - » Schedule outdoor playtime with your child before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m.



- Use sunscreen as directed. For children over 6 months of age, apply sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15.
  - » Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going out in the sun.
  - » Use a waterproof sunscreen labeled “broad spectrum” and designed for children.
  - » Test all sunscreens by placing a small amount on your child’s back. Check for rash or redness in the test area before applying the sunscreen to the rest of your child’s skin. If there is a rash, use hypoallergenic sunscreen.
  - » Zinc oxide and titanium dioxide sunscreens are good to use, particularly on sensitive spots, such as nose and lips.
  - » Use sunscreen on your child every time your child is out in the sun (all seasons) — just because it is cold outside doesn’t mean the sun is not dangerous. And remember that you can be exposed to UV rays even if it’s cloudy or snowy.
  - » Re-apply sunscreen at least every two hours (or more often) if playing in water or sweating.



Call your child’s healthcare provider if your child is sunburned. Remember that parents should protect their skin from UV damage, too.



## Car safety

Even when parked, motor vehicles can be extremely dangerous for young children. Follow these general safety tips to keep your child as safe as possible around vehicles

- Never leave a toddler unattended in a vehicle.
  - » Death from overheating may occur very quickly in a closed space.
  - » Before leaving the vehicle, always check the back seat to make sure all children are out of the vehicle.
- Teach your children that vehicle power switches (including windows) are not toys.
- Be sure to check that your child is safely inside the vehicle before closing windows.
- Keep vehicles and their trunks locked when not in use.
- Always check around and behind your car to be sure your child is not near your vehicle before you back out of your driveway.
- Remember that rearview mirrors are not sufficient for seeing a small child behind your car.

## Car seats

Even at low speeds, the crushing forces from a car crash or sudden stop can cause severe injuries to your child’s brain and body and may even result in death. Most states have laws that require children to be buckled into a certified car seat until the child reaches a certain height and age.



In 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics updated car seat recommendations based on evidence showing the best ways to protect children from motor vehicle crash injury. Children are safest riding in a rear-facing car seat until they reach the manufacturer's maximum recommendations (for height and weight).

### Many seats are approved for children to ride rear-facing for 2 years or more.

Tips for selecting a car seat for your toddler

- Research the options for your child and your vehicle.
  - » It is important to find a car seat that is safe and fits best in your car.
  - » A higher price doesn't always mean a better product.
  - » Choose the best car seat for your toddler based on your child's age and size.
  - » Rear-facing only car seats
    - Are designed for use from birth until the child is up to 35 pounds (depending on the model)
    - Are installed so that your child faces the back of the vehicle
    - Buckle child in with a five-point harness
  - » Convertible car seats
    - Are designed for use from birth until the child is 40-50 pounds (depending on model)
    - Are installed so that your child faces the back of the vehicle initially but can be "converted" to a front-facing position when your child is older (typically over age 2)
    - Buckle child in with a five-point harness
  - » Forward-facing seat with harness
    - Are designed for use by children weighing 40-90 pounds (depending on model)

- Install properly.
  - » A car seat that is not installed properly will not protect your child in an accident.
  - » Many communities have car seat installation check stations. Check stations may be at your health department, police or sheriff department, or fire station.
  - » Teach others who transport your child how to properly install their car seat
- Be ready for changing car seat requirements as your child grows.
  - » Children 2-5 years of age should be in a harness-restraint car seat (that can be installed forward- or rear-facing).
  - » Until 12 years of age (and 57 inches in height), all children should be secured in a child booster seat with a safety belt positioning device.

For your child's safety, keep your toddler in the rear-facing position as long as the car seat allows.

Misuse of a car seat can be fatal.

- Read your car seat manual and the owner's manual of your vehicle before you install your car seat.
- Use a certified car seat EVERY TIME your child rides in a vehicle.
  - » Toddlers are safest riding in a rear-facing car seat properly installed in the vehicle's back seat.
  - » Install the car seat in the middle of the vehicle's back seat (if possible).
- Car seat harnesses should be buckled snugly and according to the model's guide. Bulky clothing should be removed before buckling your child into the car seat.

- Your child should never ride in a position where there is an airbag. The inflation of the bag can seriously hurt your child.

If you need a car seat or have any questions, visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at [Safecar.gov](http://Safecar.gov) or [HeathyChildren.org](http://HeathyChildren.org) under Safety and Prevention.

NEVER use a car seat if it

- Has been recalled (call National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at 888-327-4236 for details)
- Is too old (check the “expiration” date on the car seat label)
- Has missing parts
- Has cracks
- Has been in a moderate or severe crash

If you don’t know the history of the seat, it’s best to avoid use.

## Street safety

Children should only be on streets when supervised by an adult. Be firm, calm, and consistent in telling your child over and over never to go in the street alone. Toddlers test these rules because they do not yet understand danger.

Teach your child to

- Never chase balls or other toys into the street
- Always hold the hand of an adult to cross streets
- Look both ways for vehicles or other hazards before crossing a street



## Bike safety

Bicycle-related injuries are a leading cause of head trauma. Most moderate to severe head injuries can be prevented when children wear a helmet.



Start the habit of wearing helmets early. Make sure your child wears a Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) certified helmet if riding on a bicycle or tricycle. Make sure your child sees you and other adults wearing helmets when riding bicycles or scooters. Using helmets protects you and sets a good example for your child.

## Outdoor water safety

NEVER leave your child alone near any body of water including a pail of water, wading or swimming pool, hot tub, swimming pool, lake, and ocean.

Safety tips for open water

- Make sure children wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets on boats or in open water.
- Swim at life-guarded beaches.
- Obey warning flags.



## Safety tips for swimming pools and hot tubs

- Make sure swimming pools and hot tubs have
  - » A four-sided, climb-resistant fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate
    - Locks should be at a height unreachable to the child.
    - Gates should be alarmed to notify you if someone enters the pool area.
    - Fencing should be 4 feet high, well-maintained, without gaps.
  - » Surface or underwater alarms (whenever possible)
  - » A power safety cover that meets the standards of the American Society for Testing (whenever possible)
  - » Well-maintained drain covers
- Make sure all house doors near pools are
  - » Self-closing/self-locking
  - » Alarmed to alert adults when a child may be near a pool

If you can't find your child, check first in areas that have water. All parents and caregivers are advised to learn CPR and how to get emergency help.

Did you know that children can drown in less than 2 inches of water? NEVER leave your child alone in or near water.

## Playground safety

Always supervise your child at playgrounds and check to see that playgrounds are safe. Most playground injuries result from falls. Only allow your child to play on age-appropriate equipment at playgrounds with impact-absorbing surfaces (wood chips, sand, rubber mats, etc.).



Check to see that the equipment is safe for your child. Look for broken or hazardous edges or corners. Make sure any above-ground platforms have side barriers or guardrails. On warm days, make sure that metal slide surfaces are shaded and check the slide's surface temperature before use. Be sure that swings have no open "S" hooks that could catch your child's clothing and lead to strangulation.

Teach your child the safest ways to use playground equipment. Toddlers should ride swings in the sitting position and ride slides feet-first. Never ride slides with your child on your lap because your toddler's legs could get trapped between your body and the slide, leading to injury. Remind your child to watch out for others who may be swinging, jumping, and playing when walking around the playground equipment.

## Stranger safety

Stranger danger is rare but REAL. Toddlers are unable to recognize a dangerous person from a friend. It is your job to never leave a toddler alone.

Never leave your child alone! Not even for a minute.

# Chapter 3

## Daily Toddler Care

- Nutrition
- Sleep



**Our text tips on raising a happy and healthy child are priceless. They're also free.**

**text**



[brightbytext.org](http://brightbytext.org)

\*Message and data rates may apply. Text STOP to 274448 to sbp. Text HELP to 274448 for help.

## Nutrition

Compared with infancy, your child's rate of growth will slow between the ages of 1 and 3. Your toddler's appetite will probably slow down as well. Toddlers often eat a lot one day and then seem to eat very little the next day (or next meal). Trust your child's appetite. Don't hover or demand a clean plate. If you offer a range of healthy foods, your child will eat when hungry and stop when full. Good eating habits will last your child a lifetime.

Parents and caregivers play a major role in teaching children the importance of good nutrition. Toddlers spend a lot of time watching, copying, and learning from those around them.

Let your child join you on grocery store trips and talk about the healthy foods that you see. This will make your child feel important and in better control over the foods that are offered. While preparing meals, discuss what you're doing ("watch Mommy peel the carrot"). Demonstrate your enjoyment of healthy foods. Make mealtime a family-focused, stress-free, and healthy experience that nourishes your child's body and mind.

Whenever possible, create meal and snack plans before going to the grocery store. Planning ahead can save you time and money. When you have healthy food choices available in your home, you're less tempted by unhealthy foods and you have the ingredients to create healthy meals at a moment's notice.

Keep a list of the healthy foods and snacks your child likes to eat. Try to add some new ideas to your list each time you go shopping to increase the healthy options available to your child.

The reward of good nutrition is a healthy body. Avoid using food to reward, bribe, or punish your child.

If your family is facing food insecurity contact your local WIC and SNAP offices for help locating affordable and nutritious food in your community: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/toll-free-numbers-wic-state-agencies> OR <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

## Breastfeeding

Your decision to breastfeed and to stop breastfeeding is very personal. Many parents make the decision to wean with mixed feelings. Weaning brings mothers more freedom and flexibility, and parents may feel pride that their child is reaching a major milestone. On the other hand, breastfeeding has become a special time between mother and child, which makes it difficult to let it go.

Some children wean themselves earlier than desired. Other children may not be ready to be weaned when their mother is ready. Continuing to breastfeed is a good source of nutrition for your toddler. However, for a child who is 1-year-old or older, milk (whether breast milk or cow's milk) alone does not provide all the nutrients a growing child needs. Solid foods must be a regular part of your toddler's diet.

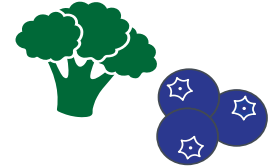
Things to consider when weaning from breastfeeding

- Weaning should be a gradual process.
  - » Start by dropping the midday feeding. This is usually the time when your child is most distracted with other activities, so it may be the easiest feeding to stop.
  - » Drop one nursing session every few days until your child is weaned. Try offering a healthy snack or a cuddle when you would normally be breastfeeding.
  - » Once your child is eating three meals of solid food and scheduled snacks, try breastfeeding only when your toddler asks.
- Pumping may be necessary to keep the milk flowing or to avoid engorgement. Your body will gradually and naturally produce less milk as you reduce the number of breastfeeding sessions each day.
- Delay weaning if your child is trying to adapt to other changes. Trying to wean when your child is just beginning child care or during teething will be more difficult for both of you.

## Toddler mealtime

Toddlers have very small stomachs. To be healthiest, your child will need you to offer a variety of food options in small amounts throughout the day — not grazing, but regular meal and snack times.

Mealtimes with toddlers are most enjoyable when you



- Understand who has the control.
  - » Parents and caretakers decide what, when, and where your child eats.
  - » Your child decides whether and how much to eat.
- Offer the right amount of food.
  - » Offer 3 healthy meals and 2 healthy snacks a day.
  - » Toddler serving sizes are about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the adult amount. Give 1-2 tablespoons of the foods that you are eating.
- Offer a variety of food.
  - » Food preferences (likes) develop early in life - habits formed now may remain for your child's lifetime.
  - » Your child may test a new food 12 to 15 times before learning to accept and eat it.
  - » For toddlers to like a new food, it must pass the look, smell, feel, and taste test.
  - » Continue to serve new foods even if the food is rejected at first.
- Avoid offering foods that can get stuck in your child's throat.
  - » Be cautious with hard foods, such as nuts or popcorn.
  - » Cut up large food items, such as meat chunks and whole grapes.

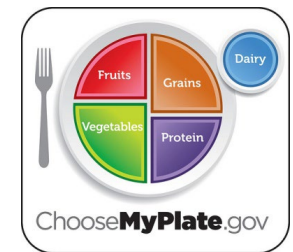
- Understand typical toddler development.
  - » Toddlers have strong opinions about what and when they will eat.
    - Children like to make choices. Let your child choose from two or three nutritious foods on the plate.
    - Do not force eating or engage in power struggles about food and eating.
  - » Plan for meals to be messy.
    - Allow your child to self-feed (despite the mess). Toddlers learn about food by looking, touching, smelling, and tasting. Be patient and expect that your child will eat with their hands while mastering using utensils (e.g. a spoon and fork) and spill while learning to drink from a cup.
    - Create a spill-safe environment for meals. Place plastic sheets under your toddler's highchair to help catch messes. Keep several wet washcloths close by at mealtimes (you and your toddler can work together to wipe up spills without leaving the table).
- Create a relaxed environment for meals.
  - » Turn off the TV (and other digital distractions).
  - » Eat as a family. Everyone eats better when they have company.
  - » Don't rush. It takes 15–20 minutes of eating for toddlers to feel full.
  - » Use your child's favorite toddler plate, bowl, cup, and eating utensils.
  - » Use mealtime to talk about the good things that happened in your day.

## Healthy dietary suggestions for toddlers

Adults often give too much food to toddlers, so start with small portions (about 1-2 tablespoons of each food item). Let your child ask for more if they still feel hungry. If it seems like your toddler is not eating enough each day, try writing down what your child eats for both snacks and meals over several days and look at the patterns over time. Your child's healthcare provider is a great source of dietary recommendations and can help answer questions if you are concerned about your child's intake.

### Creating healthy meals, snacks, and drinks for your toddler

- Meals (3 times a day)
  - Start with a toddler-sized plate and cover it
    - » 1/2 with fruits and vegetables
    - » 1/4 with lean meat or protein like meat, poultry, fish or beans
    - » 1/4 with grains like bread, rice or pasta
- Snacks (2 times a day)
  - » Fruits (fresh or dried fruits diced into small pieces)
  - » Vegetables (cooked, softened, mashed and/or diced green and yellow vegetables)
  - » Dairy (grated or diced cheese, yogurt, milk, and cottage cheese)
  - » Protein (hard boiled eggs, fish, edamame beans, and thinly spread creamy peanut butter)
  - » Grains (cereals, breads, and crackers)



For more information on healthy toddler eating, view the Nutrition section under Healthy Living at [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)



Remember that raw fruits (e.g. whole grapes) and vegetables (e.g. raw carrots or celery) can be choking hazards for toddlers. Make sure foods are soft and cut into small pieces. Avoid whole nuts, popcorn, hot dogs (unless quartered), marshmallows, seeds (e.g. pumpkin), gum, and chunky peanut butter.

### Healthy drink options for toddlers

At this age, children need milk with meals (and snacks) and water between meals and at bedtime.

- Offer a ½ cup serving of milk with each meal. Milk’s calcium and vitamin D help to build strong bones.
- Between 12 and 24 months of age, many children need the extra fat in whole milk for healthy growth and development.
- Unless recommended by your child’s healthcare provider, avoid low-fat or fat-free milk until age 2.

Water is the perfect drink for between meals and at bedtime. Make sure your toddler drinks plenty of water throughout the day!

- Water hydrates your toddler without causing tooth decay.
- Water is great for children who are learning to drink from a cup because it is less messy when spilled.

### What about juice?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents avoid giving fruit juice to a child until after their first birthday and preferably until after a child turns 2. After age 2, any offered juice should be 100% fruit juice, limited to 4 ounces (½ cup) per day and served only with a meal. Drinking juice can lead to unhealthy weight gain (obesity) and dental problems (cavities) and may cause your child to have less of an appetite for more nutritious foods.

### Mealtime tips for picky eaters

Many toddlers develop a streak of independence at this age. Your child may have strong opinions about the foods they like and dislike to eat. These strong opinions may cause some toddlers to develop the habit of “picky eating”.

When serving a new food, start with small portions. Try pairing the new food item with at least one food that your child usually enjoys. This will make your toddler feel more comfortable with the options and improve the chance that your child will try the new food.

Continue to serve new foods even if your child has rejected the same food in the past. Praise your child for trying new and healthy foods. Keep in mind that it may take several introductions before your toddler tries a new food.

Avoid labeling your child as a “picky eater”. Your child’s likes and dislikes may change frequently (possibly even day to day). The picky eating phase will go away over time. Most children outgrow picky eating habits by around age 5.

### Food allergies

When introducing new foods to your toddler, give one new food at a time every week or two to see if your child is allergic. Allergic reactions can range from mild to severe and usually occur right after a food is eaten.

Symptoms of a food allergy may include

- Skin problems (e.g. hives, swelling, itchy skin)
- Breathing changes (e.g. wheezing, throat tightness, sneezing)
- Stomach symptoms (e.g. nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)

Symptoms that may mimic a food allergy

- Skin redness from acidic foods (such as tomato or orange juice)
- Diarrhea from too much fruit juice or from food poisoning (from spoiled food)

- Vomiting from food poisoning
- Restlessness or extreme excitement from sugar or caffeine

If you have concerns about a severe allergic reaction, seek medical care immediately. If you're not sure if your child has a food allergy, ask your child's healthcare provider for advice before re-introducing the food in question.

## Healthy childhood weight

Set the stage for a lifetime of good health by starting healthy patterns now. Children who eat a healthy diet (high in fruits and vegetables, low in sugar, and low in fat) and participate in daily activity are much less likely to develop high blood pressure or become overweight. Watch your child for signs of hunger and fullness. Create limits, but allow your child's internal cues to determine the amount eaten at each meal and snack.

### Tips for healthy intake

- Remember that parents control the supply lines.
  - » You decide which foods to buy and when to serve them.
  - » Your toddler will eat what you make available.
- Watch your child's hunger and fullness cues.
  - » Trust your toddler's level of hunger.
  - » Offer healthy foods and portions for meals and snacks and let your toddler decide how much to eat (they will get the nutrients they need).
  - » Quit the "clean plate club" and remember that children who learn how to notice and respond to feelings of fullness are less likely to overeat.
- Avoid using food as a reward.
- Lead by example.
  - » Take your time and enjoy each other during family meals.
  - » Eat a healthy variety (and amount) of food.

- » Limit
  - Sugar-sweetened beverages (including soda...these add calories with no nutritional benefit)
  - Mealtime distractions (such as phones)
  - Fast food
  - Sugary foods (dessert) at every meal

Your child's healthcare provider is a great source of information about your toddler's nutritional needs. Dietary questions to discuss with your child's healthcare provider might include

- Concerns about your child's growth
- Your child's progress in weaning from breast or bottle to a cup
- How to introduce new foods
- How to handle food allergies
- Any problems your child has with eating, drinking, or swallowing



# Sleep

Sleeping, like eating, is one of many areas where your child is changing between the ages of 1 and 3. Your child is learning how to predict when it's bedtime and how to self-soothe to sleep. Be patient; it takes time for your toddler to figure out these new skills.



As a parent, it is important to remember that sleep is really a time of intense activity. Your child's brain and body are hard at work while your child is sleeping. Make sure that your child receives enough sleep. Like poor nutrition, poor sleep habits can have a negative effect on health, physical growth, and learning.

## How much is enough?

Between the ages of 1 and 3, most toddlers need 11 to 14 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Sleep requirements change over time; preschool-aged children (ages 3-5) typically need 10 to 13 hours of sleep each day.

## Toddlers and naptime

Naps help many toddlers fulfill their daily sleep requirements. Instead of needing two shorter naps each day, your 1-3 year old child may need one nap a day. Some toddlers do not need to nap every single day.

Pay attention to your toddler's cues (level of attention, mood, nighttime sleep) to determine what naptime schedule is best for your child. When children are no longer able to fall asleep at evening bedtime, parents should begin considering changing or shortening naptime.

## Tips to managing naptime schedules

- Remember that it may take several weeks of experimenting until you find the right sleep and nap schedule for your child.
- Try to go with the flow and avoid power struggles.
- If needed, transition from naptime to quiet time. A daily period of quiet time will still allow you and your child to recharge.
- For quiet time, consider
  - » allowing your toddler to play quietly in a crib or playpen
  - » encouraging your child to read books next to you while you do a household chore
  - » giving your child a cloth and asking for help with cleaning or with another household activity (if your child is too active to sit in quiet time alone)
- Stay confident because you're the best judge of how much sleep your child needs.

## Building bedtime routines

A simple and regular bedtime routine is the best way to get a sleepy toddler into bed every night. Toddlers often test parents' limits and patience when it comes to going to bed. Bedtime routines are comforting to children and helpful for parents.



Begin your bedtime routine as soon as your toddler is showing signs of being sleepy (rubbing their eyes, losing interest in playing a favorite game, or showing a change in their level of activity).

## Tips for setting and sticking with a bedtime routine:

- 30 minutes before starting your bedtime routine - wind down active or intense activity (e.g. roughhousing, scary books, loud toys).

- 5 minutes before starting the routine - announce that it's time to prepare for sleep.
- Create short, simple, and clear bedtime rules that include
  - » Brushing teeth
  - » Doing calm activities together (e.g. storytelling, reading, or listening to soft music)
- Ensure a restful environment
  - » Dress your child comfortably for sleep. Don't rely on blankets and covers to keep your toddler warm for the night. Covers are easily kicked off, which may lead to night-time waking.
  - » Lower the lights and reduce the household noise.
  - » Allow your child to sleep with a comfort object (such as a stuffed animal). Comfort objects help your child return to sleep if awakenings occur during the night.
- Encourage your toddler to fall asleep in their own bed every night. It is important for children to learn how to get to sleep without too much attention from an adult. Spend time with your child during the bedtime routine and then allow your child to fall asleep on their own.

Your child may be able to fall asleep more easily and sleep longer with a slightly earlier bedtime. Sometimes, starting your child's bedtime routine 20 or 30 minutes earlier can make a big difference. Overtired toddlers find it hard to relax their body and mind and may have more difficulty falling and staying asleep.

**Subscribe to Bright by Text** to get more ideas about preparing your child for sleep and to learn other tips to help you feel more confident on the parenting journey.

## Crib or bed?

Between the ages of 1 and 3, many children move from a crib to a bed. Sleeping in a "big-kid" bed will give your toddler a new taste of independence. However, for many children, the new freedom also leads to some fear and anxiety.

It takes a certain amount of brain development for your toddler to understand that a bed is the place to stay all night. Toddlers who take a long time to fall asleep at night, get out of bed many times a night, or wander around the house are probably not ready for a "big-kid" bed. Each child is different and will be ready for a "big-kid" bed in their own time.

Parents can help children successfully move from the crib to a "big-kid" bed by making the transition at the right time and sticking to bedtime routines.

Prepare your toddler for the change.

- Read books about "big-kid" beds.
- Let your toddler help you find a bed or new sheets.
  - » If you're using a borrowed bed, tell a story of the child who used the bed before: "They became a big kid just like you."
  - » Have your child show the new bed to visiting friends and family.
  - » Throw a big-kid bed party and invite a special friend or grandparents.
- Choose the best "big-kid" bed option for your child. Choices include
  - » A crib that converts to a toddler bed
  - » A toddler-size bed
  - » An adult-size bed with safety rails

- Help your toddler adjust to the “big-kid” bed environment and routine.
  - » Create a “big-kid” safe sleep space. Use a guardrail to prevent your child from falling out of bed.
  - » Ease the transition. For the first few days, have your toddler continue to sleep in the crib at night and use the bed for naps. Make sure your child has comfort objects (stuffed animal or blankets) in both sleep spaces.

If you find that you’ve made the switch too soon and your toddler is upset, don’t give up right away. Encourage your child to try out the bed. If your child is still upset after a few days, bring the crib back and try to transition again in a few weeks or months.

If your toddler starts climbing out of the crib before you’re ready for a “big-kid” bed:

- Lower the crib mattress frame to the lowest level so the crib rails are at their highest.
- Put mats or cushions around the crib and remove hazards from around the crib.
- If your child climbs out anyway, lower the crib sides so your toddler can get out of bed safely. A crib with the rails down can still give a toddler the idea that “this is where you spend the night.”
- Put a gate on the open door frame so they can’t wander through the house at night. For more Sleep Safety tips, see page 35.

## Overcoming sleep issues

If your toddler gets out of bed after you’ve completed the bedtime routine, return your child to bed quickly and calmly. Remember that your attention, either positive or negative, is what motivates your child to continue getting out of bed. Instead of giving extra attention, quietly tell your child to remain in bed and remind your child that you can see each other again in the morning. It may take several attempts (and a few nights) for your toddler to realize that getting out of bed does not get your attention.

If your child is waking up in the middle of the night, reasons may include

- Concern that you are not with them (separation anxiety)
- Discomfort (such as teething pain or illness)
- Dreams and nightmares (which may begin to affect children at this age)

If your child wakes up at night due to separation anxiety, here are some tips

- Quietly and quickly reassure your child that everything is okay and you are close by.
- Calmly tell your child that it’s time to return to bed.
- Provide a comfort item (e.g. blanket) to help your toddler return to sleep.
- Keep your nighttime “visits” brief and boring. Don’t give too much positive attention so your child learns to fall and stay asleep alone.

Remember that good sleep routines are one of the best tools for getting children to fall asleep and stay asleep through the night.

## Nightmares and night terrors

Nightmares are scary dreams that can wake children from sleep. Between the ages of 3 and 5, up to half of kids have nightmares. Nightmares usually happen in the second half of nighttime sleep. Your child may wake up feeling afraid. Providing reassurance will often help children return to sleep after a nightmare.

Night terrors are less common than nightmares. Night terrors occur most frequently between the ages of 4 and 12. Episodes happen in the early part of nighttime sleep. A child experiencing a night terror might sit up, cry, kick, or even sleep walk. If your child has a night terror, avoid waking the child and focus on keeping the child safe until the child returns to sleep.

### When to call your child's healthcare provider

Healthcare providers can help parents troubleshoot potential causes and solutions for childhood sleep problems. Snoring, problems with breathing during the night, or recurring nighttime sleep disturbances (e.g. nightmares, night terrors) should be discussed with your child's healthcare provider.



# Chapter 4

## Development

- Introduction to early brain development
- Cognitive development
- Social-emotional development
- Language development
- Physical development
- Activities to promote development
- Developmental challenges and delays

Raising a child isn't easy,  
but it doesn't have to be hard.

text

**BRIGHT**

to 274448



# Introduction to early brain development

---

While every child grows at their own speed and in their own way, development usually happens in a predictable pattern. There are specific developmental “milestones” that you can expect your child to meet between the ages of 1 and 3.

This chapter discusses the major areas of early childhood development. It is intended only as a guide to show how most children at this age will change and grow. The chapter also gives tips to help parents and caregivers encourage healthy toddler development.

If you are ever concerned about your child’s development, call your child’s healthcare provider. You know your child best, so trust your instincts. Free community resources, including Early Intervention services at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html> can help identify children with developmental delays who might benefit from extra support.

The most critical period of human development occurs between conception and your child’s third birthday. Most brain cells are developed at birth but they are not well connected. In the first years of life, over 1 million new brain cell connections form every second. These connections store new information to help your child begin to understand the world.

Between birth and age 3, your toddlers brain is being wired for a lifetime of learning. Brain cell connections develop as your toddler actively watches, listens, and explores. These connections form networks within your child’s brain. Brain cell networks grow stronger as your toddler practices thinking, talking, and moving. The number and variety of brain cell networks control everything from your child’s understanding of language to their ability to build relationships. Therefore, your child’s brain development depends on you and on the tools, supports, and activities that you introduce into your child’s life.

Brain research gives important information about raising toddlers.

- Your child is ready to learn from the beginning.
- Strong circuitry between brain cells (“learning”) depends on how and how much a child’s brain is used.
- Early experiences matter - both good and bad experiences affect your child’s ability to learn.
- Children are born wired for feelings and for forming relationships with other people.
- A nurturing relationship with parents or caregivers is the most important thing for healthy brain development.

## Importance of attachment

Early relationships and strong attachments help a child’s brain grow. A child who has a strong relationship with you (and other trusted adults) is able to explore and gather new information, knowing that they have a safe place to return to — you! In contrast, a child who feels unsafe or uncared for will have trouble building the basic trust needed for learning and may face future struggles with behavior, relationships, and physical health.

The attachment process develops over time. When you communicate with hugs, high-fives, and words like “good job,” your toddler knows that you are happy with their choices. Your positive reinforcement makes your child more likely to repeat the behavior that led to your positive response. Children can sense how you feel about them, and your feelings help shape how they behave and how they feel about themselves.

Research shows that the attachment you form with your child will have a direct effect on how your child thinks about learning and relates to those around them. Providing your consistent love and attention will help your toddler develop self-esteem, self-control, and the ability to care for themselves and others. The positive and trusting relationship that you build with your child will have a lasting impact on everything your child does now and in the future.



As you develop a healthy parent-child relationship with your child, remember that you are your child's trusted mentor and guide.

### Tips for forming a healthy parent-child relationship

- **Spend time with your child.** Each day, set aside some special time to play, take a walk, or just cuddle with your toddler.
- **Provide positive guidance.** Notice and comment on behavior you want to see again. Give your child hugs, smiles, and attention. Send clear messages grounded in love and support when you need your child to change a behavior. Model the behavior you hope to see your child repeat.
- **Create and follow routines.** Routines help everyone know the expectations you have for one another.
- **Give your child words to express feelings.** Help your toddler learn how and when to use these words:
  - » "I feel happy."
  - » "I feel sad."
  - » "I feel frustrated."
  - » "I feel mad."
- **Encourage exploration within a set of limits.** Exploration helps toddlers learn. The limits you set (and reinforce) keep your child safe while exploring the world. Respond to your child's needs regularly, but avoid giving in to your child's every wish. Be consistent with your expectations and discipline.
- **Take care of yourself.** Always remember that you matter, too. Parenting a toddler can be stressful, and stress worsens if you're hungry, tired, or overworked. Set good examples of self-care by eating a healthy diet, sleeping regularly, and giving yourself time-outs when needed. Remember that you are a role model for your child. How you treat yourself (and

others) has a large impact on what your child sees, learns, and imitates.

- **Show unconditional love for your child.** Remember that the positive, healthy relationships established between your toddler and the adults in your child's life will provide the foundation for your child's healthy development.

## Screen time and toddler development



Research shows that screen time does not provide the same developmental benefits as active, engaged experiences. Passive entertainment can actually be unhealthy for your child because it limits the time your child spends in active engagement with the world around them.

Screen time refers to the time spent in front of any electronic device or screen. This can include TV, videos, computer games, video games, or any other form of passive entertainment occupying your child's time.

Spending too much time in front of a screen can

- Prevent the growth of creativity, imagination, and spontaneity
- Increase impulsive, uncooperative, and violent behavior
- Encourage sedentary (non-moving) activity which contributes to unhealthy weight gain

Virtual violence is common in media programming and can be especially scary for young children. Even cartoon programming (designed for children) can contain up to 25 violent acts each hour. The AAP and the National Institute of Mental Health have found that screen time can have a negative impact on a child's social-emotional development. Children exposed to violence may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, more fearful of the world around them, and more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways.

Set a good example yourself by turning the TV or media off. Spend time playing, singing, or dancing with your child instead of depending on a media device. Keep plenty of basic, open-ended toys around your home so that these are an obvious choice during playtime. Make a special box of quiet-time activities that your child can do or play with if you need to get something done.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time (TV, computers, video games, or digital media) for children under the age of 18 months. Kids learn best with “real life” activities, such as figuring out how a toy works, playing games, or singing songs together. Even “educational” programs aren’t as enriching as real life. If introducing screen time to children over 18 months of age, select high quality material and co-view with your child. The AAP recommends that children between the ages of 2 and 5 years limit screen time to 1 hour a day.

### Media and screen-time guidelines

Limit screen time for all children and especially for children under age 3.

- Make screen time a rare activity and not part of your child’s daily routine.
- Avoid watching TV during other activities such as eating, dressing, playing, or as a way to put your child to sleep.
- Provide lots of other creative entertainment options for your child to do at home.

- Control what your child views. If possible, preview all media content.
  - » Minimize viewing of commercials.
  - » Avoid content that entertains with violence, fear, or poor values (or manners).
  - » Avoid shows with fast-changing images and short sections frequently interrupted by commercials.

When you choose to use screens, be sure to co-watch with your child.

- Make the experience interactive by asking your child questions.
- Talk about connections between what you are watching and your own lives.
- Address values by talking about how a character handled a situation and compare the character’s behavior to the behavior you expect. Compare and contrast with how you expect your child to behave.
- Talk to your child about the fact that TV is pretend and then talk more about this difficult concept.

Set a good example by limiting your own media usage.

- Remember that children learn through imitation.
- Keep in mind that adult programming (and even the commercials shown during adult programming) are not appropriate for your child, even if your child is just playing nearby and not actively engaged in watching.

TV and other screen-time activities are not good substitutes for spending time with adults and caregivers. Even shows and games that are supposed to be “educational” do not come close to providing the support for learning that your child gets by simply spending time talking, reading, helping, and playing with you.

# Cognitive development

---

Cognitive development describes your child's growing ability to think and reason. While infants are fully dependent on caring adults, toddlers are focused on developing the skills needed for independence. Toddlers love to investigate with their senses and master concepts by testing an idea over and over. Young children learn best through active exploration. This repetition strengthens the circuitry between the brain cells.

The development of thinking and reasoning is complex. It can be divided into 3 subcategories including: (1) memory, (2) information processing, and (3) problem solving.

## Memory

Memory development describes your toddler's growing ability to "remember" what was said and done in the past. As memory develops, your toddler will be able to solve current problems using information that was learned previously.

The development of memory is a new skill for a toddler. Developing strong memory skills requires tools, encouragement, and plenty of practice. As your child's ability to remember improves, your toddler will better understand instructions for games, rules for safety, and patterns that make up your daily routine.

## Information processing

Information processing refers to the way your child learns new things and applies them to the world. With memory and experience, your child will gain a new ability to process information. Up until this point, a ball was simply a ball as a whole object. At this stage of development, your child will start noticing the differences between similar objects (e.g. a red and green ball; a basketball and a soccer ball). Noticing these details helps your child learn to match items that are the same, sort objects by size or shape, and eventually learn to describe how items are the similar or different.

## Problem solving

Problem solving describes your child's ability to use memory and information processing skills to understand how things are connected and to solve problems. Your toddler will seek answers to multiple questions every day. In fact, it may seem that every other word spoken by your toddler is "Why?". Encourage problem solving by providing safe and acceptable times and ways for your child to ask questions and explore.

## Typical toddler cognitive developmental milestones

At this age children can

- Understand simple directions.
- Follow a rule when you remind them aloud (e.g. "stop hitting", "stop kicking").
- Imitate the behavior of those around them. (Imitation is a "safe" way for toddlers to practice new skills.)

They struggle to

- Remember directions or rules described at a time in the past.
- Understand why rules are important (such as why they need to hold your hand to cross the street).
- Understand why hitting and kicking hurts others (until they are reminded).
- Understand why you are frightened by the possible consequences of dangerous activities.

Between 1 and 3 years of age, the rapid formation of brain cell connections encourages the development of memory, information processing, and problem solving. This cognitive growth allows your child to experience a burst of new skills.

These new skills include the ability to

- Put a circular puzzle piece into a puzzle
- Find objects even when hidden under a cover (e.g. blanket)

- Match items as “alike” and “different” (which is useful when teaching your child to sort items such as socks)
- Match objects to pictures
- Notice differences in shapes and colors
- Understand the purpose of items (e.g. a faucet produces water)
- Recognize patterns (e.g. bedtime routines)
- Understand imaginary play (such as using make-believe dolls to represent your family)
- Figure out cause and effect
- Choose between two offered items
- Learn their own age
- Start to learn how things work (including body awareness which is useful for future potty training)

## Tips to help you support your child’s cognitive development

- Help your child develop memory skills.
  - » Create patterns and routines in your child’s everyday life to make it easier for your child to remember what comes next. These memories help your toddler manage their behavior according to past experience and future expectations.
  - » Make a picture book that reviews your daily routine. Practice reading the book together and ask your child to predict what will be on the next page.
  - » Before you do something unfamiliar, connect the new activity with something your child will recall from the recent past. For example, before your child’s next doctor visit, you might say, “We are going to the doctor today. Do you remember when we took your brother to the doctor and she weighed and measured him, then listened to his heart? The doctor will check your health in these ways, too.”

- Encourage your child to practice information processing skills.
  - » Talk with your toddler about the small differences between similar objects. Spend time discussing the sizes and shapes of everyday objects while you put toys away (e.g. “Which blocks should we put away first, the blue blocks or the green blocks?”)
  - » Play together at the park (e.g. “Do you want to go down the big slide or the little slide?”)
  - » Talk about the size and shapes of different objects in your home while you dust or put toys away.
  - » Look at pictures together and ask your child to point at small details in the picture (e.g. “Find the bird in the tree.” or “Point to the child with the red shirt.”)
- Give your child opportunities to pay attention, follow directions, plan, and solve problems.
  - » Play “hide and seek” games where your toddler tries to find an object you have hidden (make the hiding spot harder as your child gets older).
  - » Pull off one sock and ask your child to problem-solve what to do next.
  - » Give your toddler chances to explore wind-up toys, buttons, and knobs.
- Allow your toddler to watch you (or siblings) use household items and copy the behavior.
  - » Show your child how to do something (e.g. fill a cup with water) and allow your child to practice the behavior over and over again.
  - » Give your child plenty of encouragement and praise for trying to copy skills and repeat them independently.

- Add learning games to your everyday routines.
  - » Count as you climb the stairs. Say the numbers together at first, and then start taking turns saying the “next” number.
  - » Ask your child to help put clean socks in one pile and shirts in another to practice sorting.
  - » Have your child put a napkin at each place on the table and see if they can follow the pattern.
  - » Fill cups of water in the bathtub and talk about full and empty as you rinse off shampoo and soap.
  - » Read a familiar bedtime story and ask your child to try to remember what happens next.



## Social-emotional development

“Social” refers to how people get along with others. “Emotional” describes how people feel about themselves, others, and the world. Social-emotional development is your child’s growing ability to understand and manage their emotions while building relationships with other people.

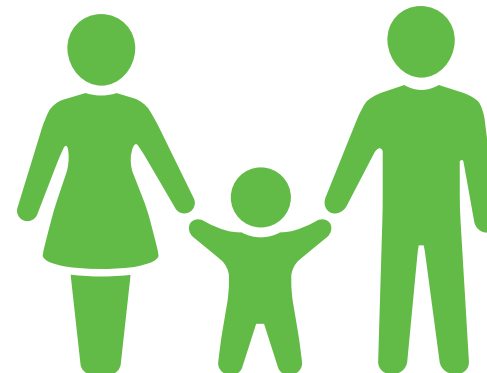
Social-emotional growth depends on the combination of your child’s unique biology, their temperament, and their life experiences. Children’s social-emotional development is healthiest when they learn to trust and relate to others, take pleasure in being alone and in groups, and feel confident about trying new activities. Your child’s social-emotional development will have a large influence on all areas of their life, including cognitive, language, and motor skill growth.

Encouragement is the key to your child’s positive social-emotional growth. Your child wants to please you and other caring adults. Doing this makes children feel powerful and successful.

## Reasonable expectations for your toddler’s social-emotional growth

At this age, many children

- See the world only from their own view and believe that everyone else should see the world this way, too
- Have very strong emotions that are difficult to manage all the time
- Are just learning the words to describe feelings
- Are often unable to prevent themselves from acting on their feelings
- May feel frustrated by the gap between what they want to do and what they can physically, cognitively, and emotionally handle
- Want to be independent but also feel scared to do so and may shift from being “capable” (“I want to walk myself”) to being “incapable” (“Mommy, carry me!”)
- May have temper tantrums and meltdowns when mixed feelings lead to frustration
- Often behave best when they can count on routines
- Have a difficult time making decisions and will change their mind often
- May start to develop new fears that require your reassurance
- Become capable of basic empathy allowing them to understand the feelings of others



## Tips to help you support your child's social-emotional development

- **Build strong parent-child bonds.** Children learn to love and trust adults who respond to their needs consistently and appropriately.
- **Develop empathy skills.** Encourage your child's understanding of their own emotions as well as the emotions and needs of others. Teach your child the words for emotions (e.g. "You look like you're feeling sad. Can you tell me why?"). Point at pictures in books and ask your child if they can guess how the person in the picture is feeling. Talk about how it makes other people feel better to know someone cares for and loves them.
- **Set clear limits.** Use simple language to explain the rules to help your child control their behavior and their emotions. Help your child make safe choices and gently redirect your toddler when necessary. If you are visiting a park and your child begins throwing rocks, you might say, "No throwing rocks. If you throw a rock and it hits another person, it might hurt them."
- **Give choices.** Instead of simply saying "no", try giving alternative choices. If your child is throwing blocks, try saying, "You can't throw blocks but you can throw this ball or this bean bag. Which do you want?"
- **Practice self-help skills.** Show your toddler how to do a task, such as getting dressed. Then allow your toddler to explore how to complete the task. Accept less than perfect results. Instead of correcting your child's choices, encourage independence. You might say, "Oh you put on a blue sock and a purple sock! How creative!"
- **Slow down.** Allow for the extra time it takes a toddler to do something independently to avoid feeling rushed.
- **Give your child responsibility.** Your toddler will want to do more and more independently. Give your child the chance to try on their own to help them feel strong, confident, and independent (key ingredients for later success in school and life).
- **Plan interesting activities.** A child who is busy playing is less likely to act out. Change activities often if your toddler gets bored.
- **Support group play.** Learning to share, take turns, and handle conflict takes practice. Guide your child to begin developing these skills.
- **Offer an emotional safety net.** Trial and error may result in more error than success, so encourage continued effort. Your toddler may develop new fears or show new caution around relatives or strangers. Provide security and support for your toddler with gentle hugs to help work through frustrating feelings. Help visitors understand your toddler's need for time and space.
- **Help when your child asks.** Respond quickly to your toddler's requests for help to teach your child that asking for help is okay and you are there to help when needed.
- **Be a role model.** A toddler's behavior is still mostly influenced by your reactions. Show your toddler the behaviors you'd like repeated. Respond calmly to problems and teach your toddler ways to settle themselves down when they encounter frustration, sadness, and disappointment.



## Play dates

Many parents introduce play dates at this age. Toddlers enjoy watching other children play and often sit side-by-side playing with toys. Your child may enjoy being around another child, but will need to learn to “play” cooperatively and share.

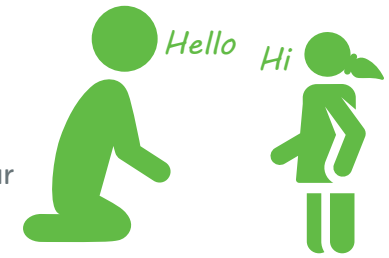


Keys to successful play time with other children

- Find a good match — a quiet 1-year-old may not do well with a very active playmate.
- Plan for short visits (typically under 1 hour).
- Expect some chaos.
- Keep a watchful eye, but allow the children some freedom to select activities (and use your parenting skills to redirect the play if necessary).
- Be prepared to help when the children don't want to share.
- Consider playing at a park or in a yard where children don't have to share toys.
- Focus on one activity, such as playing with a variety of balls, exploring play dough or dressing up with lots of hats and a mirror.
- Have plenty for everyone - having many of one similar toy is better than lots of different toys during playdates.
- Put your child's favorite toys away to avoid arguments over sharing.
- Try playing circle games to practice holding hands. Explore games like ring around the rosie and the hokey pokey.
- Ensure that all playdates occur at toddler-safe locations.

## Language development

Language development refers to your child's ability to learn to communicate. The biggest growth period for speech and language occurs between birth and age 3. Your child's ear for language grew over the first year of life. By age 1, your child was able to distinguish the sounds of your native language and hear the individual words that build the phrases in speech. During the toddler years, your child's language development will continue to move from simple to complex.



Language development begins with listening and imitating. Through repetition, your child begins to understand the connection between words and objects (receptive language). Over time, brain development allows children to attach a word to an object (or feeling or action). This skill develops into the ability to express appropriate words aloud (expressive language).

The more language your toddler hears, the more language your child will learn. The amount of conversing that goes on in a young child's daily life makes the biggest difference in a child's later learning. Language skills develop best in a world rich with sounds and sights.

Much of a child's language development is connected to cognitive and social-emotional growth. The development of memory allows children to build on past knowledge and experience. The ability to compare and contrast objects (information processing) allows children to start using more descriptive words. Your child's interest in imitation and desire to relate to others further encourages communication and language skills.



One of the most important factors in the learning of language is your child's language environment. They are exposed to a variety of sounds and conversations that promote the expansion of brain cell connections. Social interactions are a key ingredient for a toddler to learn language. The more you speak, read, and relate with your child, the more language development you can expect in return.

## Typical toddler language developmental milestones

Language milestones you may see your child develop by 12 months of age

- Recognizes own name (looks when name is called)
- Responds to simple requests ("come here")
- Tries to imitate words
- Uses at least one true word like "ball" or "baby"

Language milestones you may see your child develop by 18 months of age

- Shakes or nods head meaningfully
- Can follow simple one-step direction ("go get your ball")
- Understands simple pronouns ("mine")
- Points to one body part when asked
- Points to a familiar person or picture when asked
- Recognizes simple household objects by name ("bed," "dog")
- Imitates sounds (such as animal sounds)
- Uses the rhythm of speech that is heard
- Speaks between 5 and 25 words (learning more words by the day!)

Between 12 and 24 months of age, language typically develops from grunting and pointing to speaking single words ("mine") to experimenting with simple word combinations ("my book"). Once your child knows about 50 words, your child is set up for an exciting language-building growth spurt!

Language milestones you may see your child develop by 24 months of age

- Understands more and more of conversations
- Understands words like "him" and "her"
- Can follow a two-step direction
- Points to 5-6 body parts
- Enjoys being read simple stories
- Uses up to 50 words and understands 200+ words (adds a word or 2 every week!)
- Uses two-word sentences and simple phrases such as "More milk"
- Asks for information ("shoe?" while pointing to a shoe box)
- Refers to self by name and uses words like "me" and "mine"
- Asks one- or two-word questions such as "go bye-bye?"
- Repeats many words
- 50% of speech is clear and understandable

Language milestones you may see your child develop by 36 months of age

- Can follow a 3 step direction
- Understands location words such as "on" and "in"
- Understands action words like "playing" and "washing"
- Can name many body parts and understands body functions
- Uses 200+ words
- Speaks in short sentences (3-4 words)
- 75% of speech is clear and understandable

Talk with children! The more words they hear, the more words they will know and use.

## Tips to help you support your child's language development

- Expose your toddler to lots of language.
  - » Point out and say the names of the things you see and do in your daily life.
    - Use “real” objects to teach words. Learning to match words to pictures is more complicated for toddlers.
    - Talk about whatever your toddler is exploring (whether you're out on a walk or preparing a meal).
    - Use language to set expectations. Talk a lot to your child during routines such as feeding, changing, dressing and bathing and use the same phrases as cues for transitions.
  - » Don't use baby talk.
    - Use a variety of words to teach new vocabulary. As your child learns more words, speak to your toddler with longer and longer sentences. Over time, the phrase “roll ball” might become “Please roll the red ball to me”.
    - Model appropriate language. Remember that your child imitates everything heard or seen, so be careful of the words you use around your child.
- Encourage language by allowing your child to communicate with both words and gestures communication.
  - » Respond to your child's face, body language, gestures, coos, questioning expressions, and squeals and show that you are open to all forms of communication.
- » As your child begins to develop verbal skills, consider introducing simple sign language. This allows your toddler to express wants and needs while they are learning the correct words to express how they feel and what they need. By teaching your child the signs associated with verbal words, your child has more opportunities to communicate effectively with you during the early years of language development. Your library may have a video or books that you and your toddler can watch together to learn signing.
- Give plenty of “wait time” for toddlers to try to express what they are thinking.
  - » Watch your child for efforts to respond to your words with sounds or gestures.
  - » Encourage your child to enter the conversation and teach your child the rhythm of taking turns in a conversation.
- Expand on what your child knows.
  - » Help your child make connections between words they know and new words and phrases.
  - » When your child points or uses words like “it,” “this,” or “that,” tell your child the object's proper name.
- Teach your child phrases that they will use frequently (e.g. “milk please”).
  - » Teach words that your child will use every day and help your child practice useful words and phrases.
  - » Give specific choices that encourage your child to respond with words. For example, ask “Would you like a cracker or a pretzel?” instead of “Do you want something to eat?”

- Praise all of your child’s efforts to communicate.
  - » Build your child’s vocabulary by encouraging them to point to objects (e.g. pictures in a book or body parts) when you say the object’s name.
  - » Expect mistakes. Don’t worry about grammar or insist on perfection. Just repeat back the words you hear clearly, correctly, and slowly. For example, if your child says “wabbit!”, you can say, “Yes, I see a rabbit hopping.”

## Bilingual Learners

Research advises adults to speak whatever language they speak best at home. Your child needs to hear language spoken well in order to learn language.

Important facts about bilingual learning

- Toddlers who hear different languages will learn each of the languages according to the amount of talking they hear.
- Bilingual learners develop language at a similar pace as kids who speak one language. For bilingual learners, first words are usually spoken by age 1 and connecting 2-3 words typically occurs by age 2.
- When counting “known words” for a bilingual child, total the words the child knows in both languages.
- The mixing of languages and grammar rules may occur during early language development. This can make it harder for others to understand your toddler. However, this blending is not a sign of developmental delay.
- The key to language development is exposing toddlers to language. Listening to words and conversations in any language will help your child grow and develop language skills!

## Language Delays

Language delays are the most common developmental delay. Often, language delays will resolve over time or with minimal support. Keep in mind that each child learns language at their own pace. How early, how late, or how fast your child begins to talk is less important in the long run than how much you talk and engage your child in conversation.

Contact your child’s healthcare provider if you have concerns about your child’s language development, if your child stops talking or babbling, or if your child doesn’t seem to be responding to sounds. Rarely, language delays can be a sign of a more serious issue such as hearing loss. Your child’s healthcare provider can help you determine the source of the delay and the support needed to help your child learn to communicate.

## Physical development

---

Physical development is the growth of motor skills that help children use their muscles effectively. Motor skills and motor control depend upon the proper functioning of the brain, bones, joints, and nervous system.

Motor skills are divided into two parts

- **Gross skills or large motor skills** involve using the large muscle groups. Generally, large muscles develop before smaller ones. By age 3, children have developed many large muscles and are able to run, jump, climb, throw and kick a ball and stand on one foot.
- **Fine skills or small motor skills** involve using the smaller muscle groups, such as the hands and fingers. Small motor skills include the ability to handle small objects, move objects from hand to hand, and perform hand-eye coordination tasks. By age 3, children have developed many small muscles and are able to turn the pages of a book, scribble with crayons or markers, pound and squeeze clay, string beads with large holes, use a spoon and fork for eating, and get dressed by themselves.

Your child is learning new motor skills every day. However, toddlers get frustrated easily because their body may not allow them to do what they think they can or want to do. You will find that your child practices and repeats new skills until mastering them. The repetition may seem boring to you, but once your child has learned how to climb the stairs without holding your hand, for example, they will want to go up and down the stairs over and over until developing confidence in the new activity.

Between 12 and 18 months of age, many toddlers learn to

- Walk more steadily
  - » Newer walkers have a wide gait and will often lose balance.
  - » More experienced walkers can carry an object while walking, bend down to pick up a toy without falling, or walk on unsteady surfaces (like over pillows).
- Recover from falls
  - » Children will get back up from a fall by placing hands out in front, lifting up the bottom, and then pulling their feet back under to stand again.
- Start to run (with stiff legs)
- Stand on one foot (with help)
- Walk backwards
- Go up stairs (either walking up while holding your hand or creeping up alone)
- Scribble with a crayon
- Build small towers of blocks
- Pull off socks and shoes
- Use a spoon
- Turn a toy over to look for switches or how it works
- Use fingers to open things, push buttons, and turn knobs
- Explore buttons on TV, music equipment, computers, and phones



Between 18 and 24 months of age, many toddlers learn to

- Run
- Kick balls
- Walk down steps while holding your hand
- Walk up steps holding a rail (2 feet on each step)
- Try to jump (usually with two feet in place)
- Build block towers (5-6 blocks)
- Feed self with spoon
- Try to work buttons, zippers, and snaps on clothing

Between 24 and 30 months of age, many toddlers learn to

- Walk down steps holding a railing
- Throw overhand
- Jump off a step
- Walk backwards
- Start walking up steps by alternating the stepping foot
- Run well without falling
- Turn pages in a book
- Use knobs on doors
- Pull off clothing

Between 30 and 36 months of age, many toddlers learn to

- Jump in place
- Balance on one leg for a few seconds
- Pedal a tricycle
- Catch a ball
- Build block towers (up to 10 blocks)
- Copy a circle
- Cut with scissors
- Wash hands
- Put on a coat or shirt by themselves



## Tips to help you support your child's physical development

- Encourage movement. Help your child practice new skills they are “working” on, including walking or going up and down stairs.
  - » Play follow-the-leader.
  - » Provide paper and crayons to practice drawing and “writing.”
- Give plenty of opportunities for exploration. This helps your toddler improve their large and small muscle skills. Provide safe environments for play both indoors and outdoors.
  - » Visit a park or playground together.
  - » When you can't get outside, set aside some time in the day to stretch, jump in place, or roll on the floor.
- Help your child practice their small motor skills. Give your child safe environments to try new activities including stacking blocks, using crayons, and eating with utensils.
  - » Encourage your child to practice using a spoon and fork.
  - » Ask your child to help with dressing and undressing to learn skills including unzipping, zipping, unbuttoning, and buttoning.

Remember, although we often talk about “areas of development” — like cognitive, social, emotional, language, and motor skills — all areas of development are linked and work together.

## Activities to promote development

### Physical Activity

Engaging in plenty of active time with your toddler helps to keep both of you happy and healthy. Be as active as possible during your toddler's waking hours. Toddlers don't like to sit still. They wriggle from your grasp and want to be free. That's tiring for you, but it's a very good thing for them.

Imitation is very interesting to a toddler. Play alongside your child and demonstrate new skills and activities. It's important for adults and older children to set good examples for toddlers to follow. You will see that many things you do become part of your child's play and behavior.

Try to limit the downtime your child spends in strollers, car seats, and high chairs to no more than 60 minutes at a time (except when your toddler is sleeping). Make an effort to get outside for physical activity every day (weather permitting). Encourage at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity and plenty of unstructured play time each day.

Parents and caregivers can use physical activity to support a toddler's development by

- Taking walks around your yard or through the neighborhood
- Holding hands and climbing up and down the stairs together
- Dancing to music and clapping hands
- Making an obstacle course of pillows or boxes and encouraging your child to walk, climb, and crawl through it
- Kicking and throwing balls to each other
- Finding small and large boxes to crawl in or to push around the house

## Play

Play gives your child the chance to discover, explore, make choices, direct activities, and make sense out of the world. In all areas of your toddler's development, play is a useful tool to encourage growth.

During the toddler years, play can be a useful tool to encourage all areas of brain development. Your toddler's cognitive development will grow through play. Play gives your child the opportunity for trial-and-error learning and problem solving. Play also encourages your toddler to think about abstract or symbolic ideas (e.g. using a toy tea cup to symbolize a real drink). An understanding of abstract ideas will become important for future learning of math and reading.

Play encourages your child's social-emotional growth. Imaginary play can help parents "act out" what may happen later in the day. Pretend play also helps children work out emotions (especially fear and anxiety), learn how to relate to and get along with others, and understand things in more complex ways.

Cooperative play not only helps with social skills, but also encourages your child's language development. While playing, your child will develop the skills to communicate what they want in order to share toys or take turns on playground equipment. Words and gestures must be used to effectively play with another person.

Play is also an easy way to help your toddler develop motor skills. Whether you're running around the park together or pretending to serve each other a meal, your child's large and small muscles are exercising and growing.

You are your child's first "toy." Just like any great toy, you can help your child to solve problems, create and imagine, take turns, master coordination, and build muscles.

Play can be used to encourage all areas of toddler development.

- Cognitive development
  - » Encourage problem-solving skills with puzzles.
  - » Teach your child how to use scissors or a crayon and see if your child can imitate what you've done.
- Social-emotional development
  - » Let your child pretend to be mommy or daddy and have mom or dad pretend to be the child.
  - » Encourage pretend play to act out grief and fears or cope with difficult situations. Pretend play can also be a safe way to try on how it feels to be someone else and teaches toddlers that other people have feelings, too.
- Play encourages language development
  - » Teach new words as you play together.
  - » Use games to teach words for more complex concepts such as "over" and "under."
- Physical development
  - » Games like follow-the-leader and chasing games encourage your toddler's large muscle and coordination skills.
  - » Games like pat-a-cake helps encourage development of small muscle skills.



Parents and caregivers can support a toddler's development through play

- Set time aside each day for playing together. Explore freely, encourage make-believe, and choose games that engage your child.



- Let your child guide the play. Following your child’s lead gives your toddler the confidence to become a better learner. Over time, practice taking turns to improve your child’s social skills.
- Be enthusiastic and give the play time your full attention. Taking playtime seriously makes your child feel important. Go with the flow and match your pace with what your child can do or wants to do.
- Read your child’s cues. If your toddler is happy playing independently, leave your child alone to experience, process, and understand through independent play. If your toddler seems bored, help your child find a new way to play.
- Set realistic expectations. Choose age-appropriate toys and activities for toddlers.
  - » Select toys that can be used in a variety of ways, like blocks. These “open ended” toys often have the longest play life.
  - » Remember that less is often more. The less a toy does by itself, the more your child can create and learn from it. Less complicated toys are easier for toddlers to use, require less supervision, last longer, and are usually most used.
  - » Choose toys that allow for imitation of your activities. Your toddler will love to play with pots, pans, and spoons while you’re cooking, imitate lawn-mowing with a toy mower, or use a child-sized shovel to help with gardening.
  - » Use play to introduce your child to new ideas. For example, you can use containers and items to dump and pour to teach your child math concepts like full, empty, few, and many.
  - » Remember the importance of solitary play. Playing alone gives your child time to process things they have been doing and learning. It provides time to figure out new ideas and problem-solving techniques. Your child needs time for quiet play time every day.

- » Age appropriate toys might include
  - Large plastic animals or people
  - Dolls
  - Toy cars and trains
  - Toy (or real) pots, pans, and spoons
  - Containers of all sorts
  - Shape sorters, peg boards
  - Simple puzzles
  - Brightly colored balls
  - Blocks
  - Stacking and nesting toys
  - Push and pull toys
  - Riding toys
  - Fat crayons or markers for supervised play

Remember, there is no ‘right way’ to play. When a child plays, they’re exploring, experimenting, practicing and learning. Every child will play differently based on their own changing developmental needs. Let your child lead play activities and you join in.

## Books and Early Literacy

Early literacy is everything your child knows about reading and writing before your child can actually read and write. Early literacy is NOT the early teaching of reading. Early literacy describes the development of your child’s “reading toolkit.”

The most important thing you can do to support early literacy is to provide a setting that’s fun, verbal, and stimulating. Point out letters and words your child is familiar with in signs, magazines, and posters when you are driving, shopping, or out for a walk. Offer your child plenty of chances to talk, be listened to, read and be read to, and sing and be sung to. Your child will learn to recognize how letters, words, and reading are enjoyable and a part of your everyday life.



Books are a tool for promoting early literacy. They also help toddlers learn cognitive skills (problem solving), social-emotional skills (turn-taking), language skills (telling a story), and physical skills (turning pages).

## Tips to help you support your child's early literacy



- Pick books together.
  - » Let your child help choose the books you read. Be willing to read your child's favorite books over and over. Capture your toddler's interest with books that have doors to open and close or nursery-rhyme books with hand movements.
  - » Consider getting a library card so you and your toddler can choose different books regularly.
- Find a comfortable and quiet place to read.
  - » Snuggle up with your toddler and enjoy a book together. Don't worry about reading a book from cover to cover. Just enjoy the process of looking at a book with your child.
  - » Encourage your child to help turn the pages. This builds fine motor skills and keeps your child engaged.
  - » If your toddler doesn't want to sit, read aloud while your child plays quietly in the same room.
  - » Give your child praise, support, and love while reading together.
- Make reading fun.
  - » Use humor and expressions to make a story come to life.
  - » Tell the story in your own words or "sing" the story to keep your child engaged.
  - » Take picture walks together. Share books by looking at the pictures, asking questions about the images, and talking about what you see.

- » Encourage your child to point to the picture when you say the object's name. This shows receptive learning! When your child points to a picture, say the object's name (e.g. "dog"). Keep your words simple and consistent.
- » After reading a book, talk about the story and ask questions. Point out things, or ask questions about what happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story.
- Build reading into your daily routines.
  - » Read with your child for a few minutes at a time every day.
  - » Add a short story into your child's bedtime routine.
- Model the love of reading.
  - » Let your child see you spend at least a few minutes a day in front of a book, magazine, or newspaper. When parents have fun with reading, their kids learn to love reading, too.

Remember, children learn language from being with people who talk and listen to them. Talk a lot with your child. Every day!

## Music

Music can support all aspects of a toddler's growth. Music encourages movement and helps with your toddler's brain development during games such as "freeze dance" and "hokey-pokey." These musical activities help your child's body and mind work together while teaching many valuable skills including listening, concentrating, imitating, coordinating, and following directions.

Music can support your toddler's social-emotional development. When your child hears the same songs each day during transitions, your daily schedule will become more predictable. This predictability encourages your child's willingness to accept change. Music also helps to teach about teamwork and cooperation.

You don't have to sing like a professional to sing along with your child and share music together. As long as you are enthusiastic, your child will enjoy music and want to sing along.

Music can also be a tool to teach words and language. Once you and your child are familiar with common tunes (like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," "Three Blind Mice," or the "ABC" song), use those tunes to teach your child more words by changing or adding new words. Songs, finger plays, and word games are great ways to teach your child about rhyming, letters, and letter sounds.

Music encourages movement and physical development. When your child dances, claps a steady beat, or plays an instrument, their muscles are growing stronger.

Parents and caregivers can use music to support a toddler's development.

- Expose your child to all kinds of music: classical, folk, jazz, blues, pop, and rock 'n' roll. See what your toddler enjoys most.
- Teach your child to follow the music's rhythm by tapping or clapping. Use (or make) simple instruments (bells, rattles, shakers, and tambourines) and follow the music's rhythm. Learning to make coordinated movements is critical to learning about math and reading later on.
- Use music to change your toddler's mood. Soft, gentle music is just right for bedtime. Louder, bouncier music could be used when it's time to clean up toys.
- Use music to help your toddler make transitions throughout the day. If you play the same song every day before nap-time, your child will learn to feel more secure about what's next in your daily routine.
- Remember that you don't have to be musical to share music with your child. Your toddler doesn't know or care if you are a good singer or not — just that you are singing.

## Developmental challenges and delays

Human development is not a contest or a race. Speed of development varies from child to child. Every child grows and adjusts to the world at their own pace.

The age range for a child's growth and development can vary by months — even years. In some cases, even if a child falls outside the range of "normal," it may not be cause for alarm. An example is a child who doesn't talk very much compared to other children of a similar age, but then suddenly starts talking in full sentences.

Consult your child's healthcare provider if your child

At 12 months

- Does not crawl or drags one side of the body while crawling
- Does not stand while supported
- Does not respond when you say their name
- Does not say single words (i.e. "mama")
- Does not point to objects or pictures
- Does not look when you point at a picture
- Has lost any previously mastered skills

At 18 months

- Does not walk on their own
- Cannot stand up without pushing up off the floor with their arms
- Does not pick up objects with the finger and thumb (pincher grasp)
- Does not use gestures, such as waving or shaking head
- Does not speak at least 5 words
- Acts unconcerned when you or other trusted adults come and go
- Has lost any previously mastered skills

At 24 months

- Does not walk steadily
- Does not use two-word phrases
- Does not imitate your words and sounds

- Does not follow simple commands (such as “come”)
- Does not make eye contact
- Does not imitate your actions
- Has lost any previously mastered skills

At 36 months

- Falls frequently
- Has trouble going up or down stairs
- Does not use three-word sentences
- Does not do pretend play
- Has lost any previously mastered skills

Taking your toddler to regularly-scheduled well-child checkups helps to track your child’s development and identify if or when to be concerned. If you are ever worried about areas of your child’s development, discuss your concerns with your child’s healthcare provider.

### Early Intervention

Early Intervention is a national program designed to connect families with services — such as occupational, speech, or physical therapy — to help infants and toddlers grow and develop and to help families in this process. It is a voluntary program available to parents or caregivers who feel that their child may be facing developmental issues. From birth through your child’s 3rd birthday, early intervention programs are available in your state to provide developmental support and services. The support can help improve your child’s ability to develop and learn. It can also help you and your family learn ways to support and promote your child’s development.

If you or someone who cares about your child has concerns about your toddler’s development, early intervention services may help. You can request a free evaluation at any time to answer questions about your child’s development and to decide if your child may benefit from available early intervention services. To find the local agency in your area, visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/parents/states.html>.

# Chapter 5

## Shaping Toddler Behavior

---

- Shaping toddler behavior
- Managing specific behavioral challenges

For everyday tips to stimulate healthy growth and development sent right to your cell phone, try **Bright by Text**.



[brightbytext.org](http://brightbytext.org)

\*Message and data rates may apply. Text STOP to 274448 to sbp. Text HELP to 274448 for help.

# Shaping Toddler Behavior

---

Behavior is everything your child says or does. All day long, your child is “behaving.”

Toddler behavior can be divided into 2 “types”; (1) behavior that you would like to see your child continue and (2) behavior that you would like to see your child discontinue. Both types of behavior are normal for toddlers. Children will naturally try both types of behavior throughout the day.

## Why does behavior occur?

Understanding why behavior is happening will help you respond to your child’s words and actions.

Every toddler is different, but toddler behavior can typically be explained by one or more of the following

- Looking for attention (positive or negative) from a parent or caregiver
- Feeling curious about something desirable or unfamiliar
- Wanting to do things by and for themselves
- Imitating observed behavior
- Testing boundaries to learn what’s acceptable
- Feeling strong emotions but lacking the ability to control or express feelings
- Struggling to remember what you’ve told them in the past (remember that memory is a skill that’s developing at this age)

When you watch your child’s behavior, consider

- Does your child know your expectations?
  - » Does your child understand and remember your rules?
  - » Is your toddler’s behavior an effort to test boundaries?
  - » Are you providing consistent responses to your child’s behavior?

- » Do all of the adults in your child’s life have similar rules and expectations for your toddler?
- Is your child seeking your attention?
- Is your child responding to how they are feeling (tired, hungry, bored, curious, scared, or angry)?
- Does your child have words to express their feelings?
- Is your child reacting to what they’ve seen?
- What behavior is your child exposed to?
  - » What is the behavior of the children your toddler sees (for example at home or at daycare)?
  - » Is your child spending time with people who behave in the ways you want your toddler to imitate?

## What is discipline?

As parents, you are responsible for teaching and guiding your child to learn appropriate behavior. The focus is positive, using praise and encouragement to reinforce what your child IS allowed to do. Discipline is about guiding, encouraging, and teaching your child about the world. It creates behavior limits, lets your child know when mistakes are made, and provides positive guidance to change your child’s behavior.

## What is punishment?

Punishment is a penalty given to stop negative behavior. Instead of teaching your child the behavior you’d prefer to see (discipline), punishment assumes that your child already knows appropriate behavior.

Toddlers are just starting to recognize “right” from “wrong.” They rarely choose an undesirable behavior on purpose and need opportunities to learn from their mistakes. It’s important for parents to focus on teaching “good” behavior rather than punishing behavior that is considered “bad.”

In addition to being less effective, punishment can cause many problems for your child. Research shows that children who experience physical (e.g. spanking, slapping) and verbal (e.g. yelling, shaming) punishment have higher rates of stress and other mental health problems including depression. Punishment can also interfere with the relationship you have with your child.

## What is praise?

Praise is when you acknowledge that your toddler is doing something “good” and encourage your child to repeat the behavior. Pointing out desirable behavior helps your child understand the type of behavior you’d like to see again. By helping your child know what they are doing “right,” your toddler has more chances to choose the “right” behavior over and over. A parent’s job is to help their children learn, behave, and grow in appropriate ways. Positive guidance through praise and discipline is the most successful way to teach children to choose safe, socially responsible, and appropriate behavior.

## Supporting Desired Behaviors

Parents and caregivers can support the development of desirable (“good”) behavior by providing

- Rules
  - » Which behaviors do you consider desirable?
  - » Have you set rules to help your child understand your expectations?
- Cause-and-effect connections
  - » Does your child’s behavior guide your response?
  - » Do you react to your child’s desirable (“good”) AND undesirable (“bad”) behavior?
- Role models
  - » Do you teach your child to use words to express feelings?
  - » Are you (and other close contacts) good role models for appropriate reactions and behavior?

- An introduction to the concept of time
  - » Are you teaching your child what it means to wait?
  - » Have you taught your child strategies to control their behavior while waiting for something they want?

Toddlers are growing and developing every day, becoming more independent, exploring the world, and testing limits. Your job is to understand your child’s behavior and encourage the behavior you would like to see happening over and over again.

## Helping toddlers self-soothe

Toddlers learn how to create their own safety valves for stress. Self-comforting skills are important. They help your toddler cope with their desires and disappointments as they develop new skills. Some self-comforting strategies toddlers use include

- Carrying a special doll, stuffed animal, blanket, or piece of old blanket
- Sucking their thumb or fingers
- Sucking on a piece of cloth
- Using a pacifier
- Repeating actions, such as head banging
- Rocking
- Twirling their hair

Do not take it personally when your toddler needs to self-comfort. Normal, happy children use these calming strategies. Avoid calling attention to self-comforting behaviors. Calling attention to the behavior may make your child uncomfortable, leading to more of the self-soothing behavior. Usually, toddler self-soothing habits go away over time as children mature. If you become concerned, talk to your child’s healthcare provider.

## Tips to help parents stay in control while managing toddler behavior

- Avoid physical punishment. Parenting a toddler can be frustrating, exhausting, and overwhelming at times. It is important that parents use coping options other than physical punishment to correct a child's behavior, especially when feeling upset and out of control.
- Find strategies to control your own emotions
  - » Take time-outs for yourself.
  - » Count to 10 and take deep breaths.
  - » Try to imagine hearing or feeling the situation from your child's perspective.
  - » Write down how you are feeling.
  - » Ask a family member, friend, or neighbor to step in so you can take a walk, nap, or just get away for a minute.
  - » Contact a hotline if you need immediate support. They will listen to you, answer questions, offer emergency help, and direct you to local agencies that can offer more assistance.
    - Postpartum Support International: Call 1-800-944-4773 (4PPD) or Text 503-894-9453

Teaching your toddler appropriate behavior isn't easy and will not happen quickly. Discipline is an ongoing process that will take time. Remember that you are learning to provide positive guidance and discipline at the same time that your child is learning to behave and follow directions. Don't be too hard on yourself if what you try does not work. Instead, use the opportunity to think about and plan for how you will deal with similar behaviors in the future.

Consistency is the key. Consistency allows your child to hear the same message each time, understand the boundaries, and learn the desired behavior more quickly.

## Managing specific behavioral challenges

---

### Temper tantrums

Tantrums are a normal part of toddler development. Your child's growing curiosity may not line up with their ability to use words or complete activities independently. Toddlers often react to uncomfortable situations by crying, acting out, yelling, pushing, or biting.

A parent's best strategy is to prevent temper tantrums before they happen. While tantrums aren't always preventable, your reaction to the tantrum is. Before responding to a tantrum, consider your child's stage of development. Toddlers are just starting to learn how to express themselves and manage their behavior. How you react to your child's behavior helps determine how quickly your child learns to deal with frustration and disappointment.

Your child needs your guidance. Toddlers develop self-control with help from adults who love them and teach them which behaviors are expected and which are not okay. As a parent or caregiver, your job is to set clear, consistent, and firm limits for your child. Your child's job is to test the limits in lots of different ways until the most acceptable ways to behave are understood.



## Preventing a tantrum and setting your toddler up for success

- **Control the environment.** Every day, give your child time and space for active physical choices as well as quiet time for rest. Provide an environment where your toddler can stay safe and avoid high levels of frustration. Place child-friendly toys in a box on the floor, put coat hooks or hangers at your child's height, and get a steady stool for the bathroom so your toddler can reach the sink. A lot of undesired behavior can be avoided by making your environment child-friendly and by putting fragile, dangerous, or messy things out of your toddler's reach.
- **Model consistently.** Teach your child what TO DO instead of focusing on what not to do. Children learn by watching and copying the behaviors they see and hear. Practice behaviors you'd like your child to choose (good manners, controlled emotions) and your child will learn to choose these behaviors, too! When you see others modeling desirable behavior, point it out to your child. The more your child is observing behaviors you desire and expect, the more likely your toddler will choose these desired behaviors.
- **Identify behavior triggers.** Learn which of your child's triggers (e.g. hunger, tiredness) lead to undesired behavior. Then, plan ahead to avoid situations that trigger the behavior you're hoping to avoid. Study the patterns in your toddler's behavior. How does your child behave at different times of the day? Before and after a nap? Before and after a meal? Understanding your child's triggers helps you manage your child's behavior. While considering triggers, think about your own triggers and reactions as well. Think about whether you're modeling the behavior you're expecting to see from your child.
- **Create routines.** Your child needs a consistent set of rules for what is and isn't allowed built within the structure of a consistent daily routine. When expectations stay the same each day, your child can learn to match their behavior to the expectations. Your child will also feel in better control when you (and other adults) are consistent with their responses to your child's behavior. Encourage all of the adults in your home to follow the same set of rules and routines and carry the same expectations.
- **Offer either/or choices and say "yes" more.** Toddlers love independence, but making decisions can add a new layer of stress into your child's life. Giving two options to pick from, both of which you approve of, can make toddlers feel independent and in control while still following your rules. Either/or options can prevent tantrums and teach your child about making good choices. Instead of saying, "Are you ready for a nap?" try saying, "It's naptime. Would you like your bear or your doll to nap with you?" When you give either/or options, you'll find that you get to say "yes" all the time.
- **Encourage communication.** Pay attention to your child's attempts to communicate. Whether your child uses words or gestures to tell you something, avoid interrupting and listen to what your toddler has to say. Teach your toddler how to connect emotions with words. When you notice your child struggling, teach the words "I'm upset" or "I need help." Your child will learn to communicate with you instead of having a tantrum when feeling sadness, disappointment, or frustration.
- **Establish consequences.** Consequences are your responses to your toddler's behavior that help your child understand what you consider appropriate versus inappropriate. For example, if your child keeps throwing peas across the kitchen, you might calmly say, "Peas need to stay on the plate. If you keep throwing them, I will take you down from the table."



This lets your child know the consequences of throwing peas and allows your child to make a choice. If the throwing continues, follow-through with your consequence and calmly remove your child from the table.

- **Spend quality time focused on the positives.** Make an effort to give your full attention to your child for a period of time on a daily basis. Put away mobile devices, make eye contact, and tell your child how much you enjoy spending time with them. This makes your toddler feel valued. When spending quality time with your child, find opportunities to praise your toddler's choices and behaviors. Try to be specific with your encouragement and praise every desirable behavior so your child knows which to continue. Remember that your child wants to please you and wants your attention, especially your positive attention. By praising at every opportunity, your child will actively seek out more praise and will learn which behaviors result in a positive reaction from you.

### Managing a tantrum and helping your child regain control

- **Stay calm.** Focus on what you are teaching your child about handling stress, not on what others around you may think. Avoid trying to reason with your tantruming child. A child who is throwing a tantrum has lost control and is not able to listen.
- **Control your attention.** Remove your attention from undesired behavior. Unless your child is doing something dangerous, ignore behavior you want to discourage as much as possible. Meanwhile, pay attention to the positive. Remember that children want your attention. Paying attention to behavior you want to see helps your child learn the behaviors you prefer.

- **Change the environment.** Provide an alternate situation when your child is having a tantrum. If you have tried other discipline responses and your child continues a dangerous or aggressive behavior, try removing your child from the situation and giving your child a "cool down" period. You might firmly but gently lead your child to a quiet location, such as a different room, a hallway, or an empty corner. If an object is leading to undesirable behavior, replace the toy or activity with something you prefer. Give your child an option of something that's acceptable to do. Distraction can be an effective way to change undesired behaviors.

### Recovering from a tantrum and encouraging a reset

- **The power of touch.** A gentle hug might be just the encouragement your child needs to remember to choose desirable behaviors the next time around. Tantrumming can feel out of control to a toddler. When parents respond calmly, toddlers learn to trust that they are loved despite their missteps.
- **Reassure.** After your child has calmed down, talk about the problem behavior and why it was not okay. Give ideas for what your child can do the next time they feel angry or frustrated. Tell your child that you believe they are capable of making good choices. Let your toddler know that they are valued and loved.
- **Love unconditionally.** Remember that neither parents nor children are perfect. Let your child know that you

are a source of unconditional love, regardless of their behavior. A positive relationship with your child is the foundation of healthy development and will grow deeper with mutual respect, love, and acceptance.



## Aggressive behavior

We all occasionally have feelings of anger and aggression. Children who feel stressed, overstimulated, tired, or hungry are less able to control reactions and behaviors. Parents can help by creating routines to avoid known triggers (e.g. planning a snack into the day if hunger triggers aggressive behavior). Sometimes, parents and caretakers will need to take control of the situation to help their child develop judgment, self-control, and acceptable ways to express anger or frustration.

When your toddler acts aggressively

- Stop the aggressive behavior.
- Tell your child that the behavior was not okay.
- Remove your child from the area.
- Help your child understand why the actions were unacceptable.
- Give your child words to express feelings as well as words to apologize for the aggressive actions.
- Teach your child what behavior CAN be done next time aggressive feelings arise.
- Avoid situations that trigger undesired behavior until your child learns to make better choices.
- Model how problems can be solved with words and cooperation.
- Ensure that you're exposing your child to good role models.
- Show your child how to treat others with respect and courtesy.



## Separation anxiety

The development of separation anxiety is a normal part of a child's emotional development. Your toddler will want to control when and how separations from parents and trusted caregivers are handled. Many toddlers won't let their parents leave without becoming upset. Some toddlers may choose to leave the parent briefly, but will go around a corner and call out to the parent to make sure the parent is still there. Separation from parents challenges many toddlers. For this reason, bedtime and being left with another caregiver often become struggles during the toddler years.

Help your child with separations by

- Creating a consistent goodbye routine. Let your toddler know when you plan to leave, even if you're only going to the next room.
- Practicing brief separations. You might leave for a short time (e.g. 15 minutes) as you practice. When you leave, give your child a fun activity to pass the time to help your child handle your absence.
- Leaving your child with familiar caretakers. If you need to leave your child with someone unfamiliar, give your toddler a few minutes to get used to the new caretaker before you say goodbye.
- Keeping your promises. Let your child know when you plan to return with clear words that your child will understand (e.g. "after your nap"). Follow through by returning when you've promised. Avoid saying that you will return in a few minutes if you know you will be longer. When you return, remind your child that you promised you would come back and you did.

## Fears

Toddlers are working out inner fears. As children begin to explore the world and take on new challenges, it's normal to develop some worries. With your support, children can develop skills to help them handle "scary" situations.

Some of a toddler's best coping skills to handle fear can be

- Being able to say "no" to being held or touched by unfamiliar people (including family members)
- Watching and waiting before starting a new activity
- Observing mom's or dad's response
- Using a doll to act out fears
- Practicing handling a fear with the help of a parent or trusted adult

To help ease fears and stress

- Follow your child's lead.
- Let your child decide their readiness to try something new, such as going down a tall slide.
- Avoiding teasing children about their fears.
- Tell your child you understand their fears and are there for help and protection.
- Discuss fears by reading a book about a particular fear or telling a story about overcoming a fear.
- Give pep talks.
- Tell your child what to expect in a new situation.
- Visit new places ahead of time (e.g. if your child is going to a new group or class). Practice the new activity step-by-step and allow an adjustment phase for new events or people.
- Keep your toddler from seeing or being around scary movies or TV.
- Lead by example because your child picks up on your fears.

## Toilet training

Toilet training is really toilet learning and it takes teamwork between the child and the adult caregivers in your child's life. Toilet training requires your toddler to recognize the need to use the bathroom, wait to get to a toilet, lower their pants, and sit long enough to "go." This is a lot for a toddler, and this readiness often takes time and maturity. While there is no "right" time to toilet train, many problems can develop if you force toilet training before your child is ready.



Problems in toilet training most often start when a child is encouraged to toilet train before they are ready. Successful toilet training depends on patient, understanding adults AND a child who

- Has the ability to control their bladder and bowel movements
- Is willing to use the toilet
- Understands how and why to use the toilet
- Likes to have a clean diaper

Between the ages of 18 and 24 months, many children start to show signs of being ready to learn to use the toilet. Some children may not be ready until 30 months or older. The entire process should be positive and focused on teaching. Your job is to give your child the confidence to control their body functions.

Toddlers are showing signs of toilet training readiness when they

- Can follow simple instructions
- Prefer a clean diaper
- Understand words about going to the toilet (pee, poop, urine, bowel movement 'BM', toilet, potty, dry, wet, etc.)
- Know what the toilet is for
- Can "hold it" for a short period of time once they know they need to go

- Know words to express the need to go
- Show willingness to stop other activities to go to the toilet
- Ask to wear “big kid” underwear
- Keep diapers dry for two hours or more
- Can pull down training pants (or underpants) and clothes
- Show an interest in using the toilet or potty chair

Sometimes, adult caregivers may ask children to use the toilet before the child is ready. Reasons that this might happen include

- Child care requirements for toilet learning
- Grandparents’ or other family members’ opinions about when a child should use the toilet
- Parents’ own experience with toilet teaching and learning
- Belief that successful toilet learning is a sign of successful parenting
- The high cost of diapers

Expect setbacks if you toilet train too early. You’ll have the most success if you wait until your child is ready.

You can help your child prepare for toilet learning

- Talk about going to the toilet and using words to describe it.
- Discuss the sensations of needing to potty.
- Read books about going to the potty.
- Let your child watch you use the toilet. Talk about using the toilet when you need to go. Imitation is a very good way for your child to learn. Young children want to be like mommy or daddy.
- Teach healthy hygiene habits. Talk about wiping from front to back and ALWAYS washing hands when done using the toilet.

- Teach your child to sit on the toilet but don’t force it (and make sure your child has any needed support to reach the toilet and sit on it without their legs dangling, such as a step stool).
- Make sure to dress your child in clothes that are easy to take off or pull down.
- Involve everyone in the family as you train your toddler. Make sure that all of your child’s caregivers (babysitters, grandparents, child-care workers) follow the same routine. Decide and agree upon what words you are all going to use when you talk about using the toilet.
- Encourage your child to tell you about dirty diapers. When you change the diaper, put bowel movements in the toilet and say, “This is where poop goes”. Then let your child flush the toilet.
- Start with practice runs at times of day your child typically has a bowel movement or dirty diaper. This increases the chances that your child’s toileting efforts will lead to success.

Delay toilet training if your family is experiencing

- The birth of a new baby
- A change in child-care settings
- A move (either to a new home or even to a new room or bed in the same home)
- Illness
- The death of a loved one (including pets)
- A planned period of travel
- Any other stressful time in the family or home

## Introducing a new baby

As adults, we think of the arrival of a new baby as a joyous and exciting occasion. For children, however, it doesn't always feel that way. Newborns take a lot of energy and time. In addition, after a baby arrives, life is less predictable as mom recovers from the birth and the family learns the needs of the new family member.

You can help your toddler adjust from being the 'baby' to welcoming a new baby by understanding how your toddler might be feeling. Your toddler might feel excited about welcoming a new brother or sister but might also feel

- Worried that you will love the baby more
- Angry at you for having another baby
- Sad to lose the "baby" status or only-child status in the family
- Frustrated by having to share your time with another child

Here are some tips to help your toddler adjust to the new baby.

- **Stick to routines.** When parents keep familiar limits and routines, toddlers feel safe and confident that life will stay predictable even with a new baby in the home.
- **Involve your toddler in adult-supervised care of the baby.** Let your toddler assist with holding, helping with diapers, or showing visitors the baby's rooms (as much as your toddler is interested).
- **Avoid asking your toddler to run too many baby errands.** Your toddler might become frustrated if you frequently ask them to get a blanket, diaper, or pacifier for the baby.
- **Set aside a special time every day when you can focus on your toddler.** You can schedule this time around a bedtime story, playtime while the baby sleeps, or reading a book to your toddler while feeding the new baby.

- **Expect some "acting out" behavior.** Your toddler is not only adjusting to a new sibling, but also to a new set of roles and expectations. The acting out behavior might include the following
  - » Sleeping routines may suddenly change. A child who used to go right to bed at bedtime may now try getting out of bed to test you.
  - » Eating routines may suddenly change. Food preferences and appetite may shift.
  - » Toileting skills may regress. If a toddler has successfully learned to use the toilet, they may begin to have accidents again.
  - » Aggressive behavior may develop. Your child may
    - Reject the new baby verbally "Send the baby back!"
    - Demand, cling, cry, or whine to you to get more of your attention
    - Hit, push, or pinch the new baby
- **Create limits for aggressive behavior.** Spend special time with your toddler talking about how frustrating it can be to have a baby in the home. Suggest desirable ways for your toddler to express their emotions and praise your toddler when they communicate their feelings with you.
- **Remind your toddler how much they are loved.** Let your toddler know that you understand that having a new baby is frustrating. In time, everyone will adjust to the change.

Remember that extra supervision is necessary to make sure older brothers and sisters are safe around a new baby in the home. Acting out will not continue forever and will end more quickly if your toddler is given appropriate ways to express their feelings.

## Sibling rivalry

Sibling rivalry includes the jealousy, competition, and fighting that can happen between brothers and sisters. It is a concern for almost all parents with two or more kids. Sibling rivalry is a normal part of growing up and should be expected.

Problems often start right after the birth of the second child. They often worsen as the younger child's physical skills improve. For the older child in the family, toddlers can be challenging to have as a brother or sister. Toddlers have a strong desire to become involved with everything around them. This can be hard for an older child accustomed to having a greater amount of control and attention.

Try to help your kids develop skills to work out conflicts on their own. Teach them how to compromise, divide things fairly, and respect each other. Give your children the tools to solve problems and then express your confidence that they can work it out by telling them, "I'm sure you two can figure out a solution."

To reduce sibling conflicts, you can

- Show your children how to take turns
- Encourage your children to play together
- Remove any objects involved in a conflict (e.g. a particular toy), distract with a different object, or set a kitchen timer to give each child time to play with the object that is creating issues between your children.

Another trigger for sibling rivalry is when children both want the attention of a parent. Sharing your attention with a younger (and often more needy) child can lead older children to feel frustrated, jealous, and left out. Instead of talking about those emotions, your older child may lash out by screaming, hitting, pushing, or snatching toys from their younger sibling.

Help your older child manage aggressive feelings toward your toddler by

- Explaining to your older child that aggressive behavior is not okay and is not safe
- Reminding your older child that toddlers learn by imitation and everyone in the family needs to help the toddler learn how to touch gently
- Teaching your older child peaceful ways to get your attention (and then giving them immediate attention and praise when your older child uses one of the things you suggest)
- Explain your older child's special importance to you and to your family by
  - » Telling your older child how happy you are to have a helper, someone who understands how to act like a "big kid"
  - » Reminding your older child that your toddler loves and looks up to them. Toddlers like to imitate and learn by doing everything they see their big siblings do.
  - » Inviting your older child to be part of the toddler's "teaching team." Ask your older child to help teach your toddler about expressing feelings, controlling emotions, and taking turns.
  - » Helping your older child recognize that they were once little and were learning the things that you're currently teaching your toddler
  - » Talking about how your older child is unique and how each of your children's differences make them special





- Provide examples of positive ways to get your positive attention like
  - » Demonstrating their independence. If your older child has some skill they are proud of and can do all by themselves, let them know that they can show it off to you. Pay attention and offer lots of praise and encouragement when your older child performs the new skill.
  - » Bringing you a new discovery. Ask your older child to make a “big kid” discovery, like finding a rock, a bug, or a flower and bring it to you. When they show you the discovery, pay attention and praise their good work.
  - » Drawing you a picture. Children love to draw and paint. Show interest and comment on your older child’s artistic efforts. Offer to hang the picture in a special place for everyone to admire.

## Children with special needs

When children have developmental delays or special needs, parents need to adjust their approach to managing typical toddler behaviors. You know your child’s developmental stage and abilities best and will need to provide positive discipline at a level that is respectful of your own child’s developmental abilities. Seek help from your child’s healthcare provider or from Early Intervention Services if you have specific concerns about managing your child’s behavior if your child has special needs and/or developmental delays.

## What’s Next?

With your guidance and love, your child will continue to grow, develop, and learn healthy life-long habits. Let Bright by Text accompany you on your parenting journey. Text BRIGHT to 274448 to subscribe. You’ll receive free games, tips, and resources targeted to your child’s age and developmental stage and ensure that your child is off to a bright beginning.

