

Infants and Toddlers



The years from birth to three are an important period of brain development. Babies and toddlers learn through their relationships with their parents and other caregivers. Helping them feel safe and secure creates a sense of trust in others and helps them feel comfortable learning more about the world.

Infants (Birth Through 1 Year)

- Beginning around 6-7 months, babies begin to cry and feel anxious around people they do not know well. Because your child does not yet have words, her behavior will best tell you how she is feeling.
- By 1 year, your child will be crawling, pulling up and maybe beginning to take some steps.

What You Can Do

- Comfort and hold her often. Don't worry about spoiling. Babies cannot be spoiled by "too much" holding.
- Respond quickly to your baby's crying. This helps her learn to trust others.
- Supervise your baby! She is learning through what she sees, hears, touches, tastes and smells. As she becomes more mobile, make sure that the house and other areas are "baby proofed."
- Read to baby daily, sing and talk to her often. Name things and describe what she is doing and what is happening around her.

Toddlers (1-3 years)

Toddlers are full of energy and curiosity and are trying to master skills like walking, talking and climbing. Their biggest challenge is figuring out who they are. This can be a major challenge for parents and caregivers, too, because it means that they are beginning to develop some independence. With independence comes a need to do things the toddler's way. For most parents and caregivers, hearing the words "no," "mine" and "I do it myself," combined with an attitude, are hard to manage.

Things to Keep in Mind

- All typically developing toddlers push for independence.
- Each child passes through this phase of development differently with many parents and caregivers noticing an increase in these challenging behaviors around 18 months and again around 30 months.
- Toddler tantrums are a common response to frustration as they try to balance their need for independence while also realizing a need to still feel dependent on you.
- Toddlers often respond with a loud "NO!" almost automatically even when they mean "yes."
- Toddlers cannot remember rules you set so be prepared for your child to make the same mistakes over and over.
- Recognize that toddlers are trying to express individuality and the purpose of her challenging behavior is not to be disrespectful.
- Challenging behaviors in the toddler years won't last forever. When you allow her to assert independence in acceptable ways, she will pass through this stage and move to the next one.
- With patience, guidance and consistency, she will develop more appropriate ways of expressing her needs and wants.

Toddlers are active and curious, which is important for brain development. Many toddlers “get into everything,” creating frustration for parents and caregivers who try to keep up and keep them safe. These behaviors may make you wonder if your child is hyperactive but most toddlers are on the go and into everything and this is typical.

When Caring for an Infant or Toddler, Remember...

- She cannot be expected to understand what danger means at this age.
- She is very busy and unable to remember all of the safety rules and that is why CONSTANT SUPERVISION and reminders are necessary.

- While she might often seem defiant when disobeying the rules, remember that at this developmental stage resistance to following directions is more about the strong need to explore the world and becoming her own person.
- She cannot be expected to control her own actions. When she sees something she wants to look at or touch, she will “go for it!” She will explore with her mouth so awareness of what is in and around her environments is very important.

If you find your infant or toddler to be exceptionally challenging, call your county health department and ask for a Child Guidance professional for help and parenting assistance.

Sources: Adapted from “Parent Express”, University of California, Cooperative Extension Service



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