

# Toddler Topics

For parents of children 12–24 months

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This issue is about children  
18-21 months old



Dear Parents:

How many of the following words describe your toddler?

Curious	Messy	Infuriating
Active	Determined	Unique
Noisy	Busy	Lovable

What other words would you add to the list to describe your child's special quality?

Being a parent can be fun, but it's also hard, frustrating, and tiring. Sometimes every parent feels like screaming—or running away. Many parents of young children have discovered that getting together with other moms and dads is one way to relieve some of the pressure that may build up when you spend too much time alone with a small child. It's also a great way to compare notes about child rearing—from how to potty train to temper tantrums. And if the parent support group you find provides well-planned child care, your toddler can enjoy the company of people her own size while you chat with other parents. To locate parent groups in your community call your county Cooperative Extension office, Department of Social Services or Health, or local schools, churches, or libraries. If you can't find a group, get together with a friend and start one! Call your local Cooperative Extension office and ask for a copy of *Planning a Toddler Playgroup in Your Own Home*, HDFS Fact Sheet 3.



# What's It Like to Be 18 to 21 Months Old?

## How I Grow

- My walk is a lot less wobbly now—sometimes I trot pretty fast!
- I can even lean over from a standing position to pick something up. Some friends my age can squat without falling over.
- I like to practice climbing on furniture—even when it makes you mad! (By the time I'm 21 months old, I'll jump off furniture, too!) Please give me something low and safe to climb on—a stool perhaps.
- During these three months I'll learn to walk up stairs—but I need to have both feet on each step, and it helps to have you right there—and a railing to hang on to.
- By the time I'm 21 months old, I'll like to push wagons and doll carriages or pull wheel toys behind me (although I may forget they're there!).
- I like to move to music now. Don't laugh at my dancing, please.
- I can kick, push, or throw a big ball, but I'm not too good at aiming yet.



David Dwyer

- I'm getting better at using my hands: I can feed myself and drink from a cup although I spill a lot. I may know what spoons are for but still prefer to eat with my fingers.
- I can build a stack of three to six blocks or cans or small boxes.
- If I see a crayon or a pencil, I know it's for scribbling, but I haven't quite figured out the difference between a piece of paper and a wall. You'll have to tell me "draw on the paper" and then be with me to help me remember.



William Lapardo

## How I Talk

- I can follow simple directions—if I feel like it.
- I understand many more words than I can say myself. I can point to my eyes, nose, ears, and other body parts if someone asks me where they are.
- I'm very good at saying "no."
- I am learning to put words together, like "ice cream—me." Some children my age can talk with long, complete sentences (when they do, grown-ups often expect them to act older than they are).
- I really like simple picture books and like to look at some of my favorites over and over again. I love looking at pictures of myself.
- I like to have people sing with me.
- I ask a lot of questions although I may ask all of them by saying "what's 'at?" or "why?"
- I try to imitate whatever people who are important to me say or do.

## How I Respond

- I need time to get to know people.
- I have strong opinions about who should do certain things like dressing or bathing me.
- I'm afraid of some people or things for reasons I don't have words to explain.
- I get confused and cranky if too many different people take care of me.
- I feel safer and more comfortable when my security blanket or special toy is with me.

# Your little baby is turning into a real person with feelings, opinions, and actions that are all her own!

## How I Understand

- I understand best when I can touch, taste, shake, smell, or experiment with things I want to learn about.
- I want to turn every dial or switch I see.
- I find out about small holes (even electrical outlets) by pushing things into them.
- I count on grown-ups to put away things I could damage—or that would damage me. Electrical outlets can't be put away, so grown-ups will have to put safety caps on them.
  - I need to practice new skills over and over—like taking off my socks or flushing the toilet.

## How I Feel

- I feel pleased that I can get around the house on my own to explore all the interesting objects and places I could only look at when I was younger.
- I often feel frustrated because I don't know the words to tell you what I want or need.
- I really like being independent, but I also want to be able to act like a tiny baby when I feel tired or lonely or bored.
- I get upset when I sense that mom or dad are worried, sad, or angry. I'd like to comfort them, but I don't know how so sometimes I'll just be mischievous to remind them I'm still around.



There's a wonderful word for what's going on—autonomy. We all know an automobile moves because of the power of its own engine. The first part of the word "auto" means "self." And just as cars are powered by their own engines, so toddlers want to move under their own steam. They are developing their own selfhood. Part of this process means they may say "no," or have temper tantrums, or even defy adults who care for them. This often difficult-to-live-with behavior means that the toddler is struggling to grow into a person—and the process involves push-

ing away adults so as to discover who she is and what she can do. Sometimes adults think that the "terrible two" behavior they begin to see in children between 18 and 21 months should be punished or strictly controlled. Often, however, being strict or harsh with a toddler may increase misbehavior because the child has to struggle even harder to find out who his "self" is and what he can do. Of course, children of all ages need limits, but at this age rules should be few, simple, and clear—designed to keep the toddler and her family safe and comfortable.

## Parents of toddlers must consistently enforce some rules:

- Stay away from the stove.
- Stay on the sidewalk, not in the road, on our walks.
- Stay in your car seat in the car.
- Be gentle with other living creatures (babies, cats, mothers, fathers, dogs, and so on).

Write down the other rules that are important for your child to obey.

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## Games for Toddlers

Children of this age love to practice walking, running (often this looks more like trotting!), and climbing. A big, sturdy cardboard box to crawl into, climb onto, or push across the floor or yard will often be a better plaything than a store-bought toy. Toddlers should be involved in activities that help their growing bodies develop well.



## At this age toddlers often want to help adults around the house.

They love to help wash dishes, dust, sweep, and chat on the telephone, and they will (if they are in the mood!) run simple errands if a parent says, "Could you please bring my purse?" or "Maybe you can get our boots out while I find our mittens?" Even when you're very busy you'll save time in the long run by involving your "helpful" toddler in your activities.

Toys that will be useful in their play include unbreakable dishes, child-sized housekeep-

ing equipment such as brooms, sturdy cars and trucks, washable dolls, and cast-off hats, wallets, or adult clothes to use for dress-up.

Your toddler may want to put small toys into a bag, basket, or old pocketbook, carry them to a new location, and dump them out. He's demonstrating to himself (and you!) that he's good at moving objects—something he certainly could not have done a few short months ago.

## Puppets Are Fun to Make!

Put a sock over your hand—you have made an instant puppet who can talk to your child!

You and your toddler can make simple puppets from brown paper lunch bags and paper cups, too. Just draw simple faces on them and slip one over your hand. Or make a finger puppet. With a marker and a tissue, your finger quickly turns into a puppet when you need one.



## Toddlers and Books

A love of books may be one of the most precious gifts a parent can give a child. You may have found that your baby began to enjoy looking at pictures and turning pages before he was a year old. At this point he loves to sit on your lap to read a favorite picture book—perhaps one about animals, trucks, or children doing the everyday activities he does himself.

Usually one sentence from you about each picture is enough.

"There's a brown dog!"

"Look at the snowplow!"

"That boy has red boots just like yours!"

Sometimes your child will want to read to you. He'll point to the object he recognizes and say, "Doggie!"

"Pwow!" (as he points to a picture of a snowplow)

"Boots!"

If he does this, pay attention! Give him a smile or hug and say, "That's right! there's the brown dog"—and so on. These are the early steps in reading,

and what you say or do may influence your toddler's attitude toward books in the future.

Some parents store their toddler's books in a basket she can carry around the house. Not only does this meet the child's need to move objects from one place to another, but a book is available for a quiet time in many different places.

If you have not already done so, explore the resources of your local library. You may find a story hour or special book collection for toddlers. Ask for books about children and parenting. A good one is N. J. McDiarmid, M. A. Peterson, and J. R. Sutherland, *Loving and Learning* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

Looking at pictures in a book with a loving adult is almost always better for a toddler than looking at pictures on a television screen, even when the loving adult watches, too.



# Feeding Toddlers

Toddlers develop strong preferences for certain foods—and equally strong objections to other foods. The attitudes children form toward food may be as important as the foods they eat. Try not to force toddlers to eat. Try also not to use foods as reward or punishment.

The Basic Four Food Groups are a helpful tool in planning an adequate diet. Daily selections from all four groups help to ensure that the diet meets the toddler's nutritional needs. Three regular meals and three nutritious snacks can be planned by combining foods from the following categories.



## Vegetables and Fruits (4 servings daily)

Contain vitamins A and C

Best sources:

Fruits and juices: citrus fruits, cantaloupe, strawberries, apricots, raisins (contain iron), peaches

Vegetables: carrots, winter squash, cabbage, spinach, collards and cooked greens, broccoli, green peppers, tomatoes, pumpkin



## Grains (4 servings daily)

Contain carbohydrate, thiamin, iron, niacin, protein

Best sources:\*

Breads and crackers; hot and cold cereals; rice, pasta (macaroni, spaghetti, noodles); muffins, pancakes, quick breads; tortillas

Does not include cakes, pies, pastries, and "dessert" foods that are high in sugar and fats but low in vitamins and minerals

\*Use whole-grain or enriched products; some essential vitamins and minerals are lost in grain processing.

## Milk Products (3 servings daily)

Contain calcium, riboflavin, protein

Best sources:

Milk, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, ice cream

## Protein Foods (2 servings daily)

Contain protein, niacin, iron, thiamin

Best sources:

Meats, poultry, fish, eggs, dried beans and peas, nut and seed butters

A very general rule for determining serving sizes from the Four Food Groups is one tablespoon per year of life. Of course, this varies depending on the foods served. For example, a main-dish casserole combining foods from several groups would warrant larger child-sized servings than a casserole served with other foods. Some typical serving sizes for toddlers are

1/2 cup of milk or juice

1/2 slice of bread

2-4 tablespoons of rice or cereal

1-2 ounces of meat, fish, or poultry

2-4 tablespoons of vegetables

1/2 apple

1/3-1/2 cup of cooked dry beans, peas, or lentils

2 tablespoons of peanut butter

## What about You?

Parents of toddlers often feel tired most of the time. Just watching that active little person zoom around the house can be exhausting. Keeping toddlers safe requires constant attention, and sometimes it seems you can't relax for a minute. Life may be a little easier if you take time to toddler-proof your house—it's surprising how many dangerous places and objects toddlers can discover. Although you can never leave a child of this age unsupervised, supervision will be easier if you take the following steps. Keep doors leading to stairways, driveways, and storage areas securely fastened. Put gates on stairways and porches. Keep screens locked or nailed.

Fence the play yard. Provide sturdy toys with no small removable parts and of unbreakable material.

Never leave a child alone in the tub, wading pool, or around open or frozen water.

Store all medicines and poisons in a locked cabinet. Store cosmetics and household products out of reach of the child.

Provide guards for wall heaters, registers, and floor furnaces. Never leave children alone in the house. Close supervision is needed to protect children from accidents.

Be watchful of your child around electrical cords and outlets.

If your house is safe, you and your child will have fewer conflicts. Even so, you may have some emergencies.

Put these numbers by your telephone:

Rescue Squad or Emergency Medical Team

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Your Doctor

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Poison Control Center

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Fire Department

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Police or Sheriff

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Neighbor or Friend

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When in doubt call one of them!

## In the Eyes of Your Toddler

You are the most important person in the world! Take care of yourself. Eat nutritious foods, get enough rest and exercise, and develop an interest in something you have always wanted to do. Call Cooperative Extension, your local Y, church, or school for ideas about groups that may interest you. Being a parent doesn't have to be lonely—BUT *you* have to take the first step or make the first call. When you do, you'll find many people who care about you and want to help.

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