

TODDLER DEVELOPMENT

TODDLERS

When children learn to walk, they are called toddlers. Usually this term is applied to one and two-year-old children. This is a stage in the growth of a child and not a specific age.

The toddler stage is very important in a child's life. It is the time between infancy and childhood when a child learns and grows in many ways. Everything that happens to the toddler is meaningful. With each stage or skill the child masters, a new stage begins. This growth is unique to each child.

Children have their own time-table. During the toddler stage, most children learn to walk, talk, solve problems, relate to others, and more. One major task for the toddler is to learn to be independent. That is why toddlers want to do things for themselves, have their own ideas about how things should happen, and use "no" many times each day.

Much growth and change, mood swings, and some negativity characterizes the toddler stage. Toddlers are long on will and short on skill. This is why they are often frustrated and "misbehave." Some adults call the toddler stage "the terrible twos."

Toddlers, bursting with energy and ideas, need to explore their environment and begin defining themselves as separate people. They want to be independent and yet they are still very dependent. One of the family day care provider's greatest challenges is to balance toddlers' need for independence with their need for discipline. Toddlers are very concerned with their own needs and ideas. This is why we cannot expect them to share.

Toddlers sometimes get frustrated because they do not have the language skills to express themselves. Often they have difficulty separating themselves from their parents and other people who are important to them. Adults who work with toddlers often find it helpful to appreciate toddlers' need to do things their way.

Usually between two and one half and three years of age, children begin to take an interest in being toilet trained, and by age three they are ready to be known as preschoolers. By this age, most children are toilet trained, have developed verbal skills, are continuing to be more independent, and are taking an active interest in the world around them.

The toddler stage can be a difficult for adults and toddlers. An understanding of this stage of development can make it more fun for everyone. This fact sheet lists some of the characteristics of toddlers. These characteristics are listed for three main areas: physical (body), social (getting along with others) and emotional (feelings), and intellectual (thinking and language) development. Remember that all toddlers are different and reach the various stages at different times.

ONE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

Physical Development

- They may grow less quickly than during infancy.
- They may eat less, but they tend to eat frequently throughout the day.
- Most walk without support by 14 months.
- Most walk backward and up steps by 22 months.
- They get better at feeding themselves, although spills should still be expected.
- They drink from a cup with help.
- They can stack blocks.
- They can scribble.

Social and Emotional Development

- They want to do things independently.
- Temper tantrums are common.
- They enjoy playing by themselves or beside (not with) other children.
- They have difficulty sharing toys. They may be possessive.
- They cannot remember rules.
- They view themselves as the center of the world.
- They become increasingly more self-aware. They begin to express new emotions such as jealousy, affection, pride, and shame.
- They show increasing fears.
- They may continuously ask for their parents.
- They have rapid mood shifts. Their emotions are usually very intense but short-lived.

Intellectual Development

- They are curious.
- They point to objects that they want.
- They imitate animal sounds.
- They name familiar people and objects.
- They combine two words to form a basic sentence.
- They use the pronouns me and mine.
- They use "no" frequently.
- They name body parts and familiar pictures.
- They use objects for their intended purpose.
- They begin to include a second person in pretend play.
- Their attention span is short.
- They can hold a pencil and scribble.
- They are very active.
- Because of their developing imagination, they have trouble knowing what is real and what is pretend.

TWO-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

Physical Development

- Children are generally more active than at any other point in their lives.
- They walk, run, climb, walk up and down stairs alone, and dig.
- They throw balls and kick them forward.
- They jump with two feet together.
- They stand on tiptoes.
- They take things apart and put them back together. They like to screw and unscrew lids.
- They feel discomfort with wet or soiled diapers.
- They start to show an interest in toilet training.

Social and Emotional Development

- They begin to play simple pretend games. Their fantasy play is very short and simple. It does not involve others.
- They are generally very self-centered and sharing is still difficult. They enjoy playing near other children.
- They try to assert themselves by saying "no."
- They sometimes do the opposite of what is asked.
- They like to imitate the behavior of adults and others. They want to help with household tasks.
- They become frustrated easily.
- They refuse help.
- They still need security.
- They are more sure of themselves than one-year-old children.

Intellectual Development

- They follow simple directions.
- They use three or more words in combination.
- They express their feelings and wishes.
- They use objects to represent other objects.
- They still have a very limited attention span.
- They can memorize short rhymes.
- They join in simple songs.
- They begin to think about doing something before doing it.
- They have trouble making choices, but they want to make choices.