

TODDLER DEVELOPMENT (18-36 MONTHS)

In our culture there are several themes that run through the social and emotional development of children in this age range. Although many of these behaviors are difficult to deal with and may look negative, they are often age appropriate and a very important part of a child's maturation process.

NORMAL DEVELOPMENTAL THEMES

The quest for independence, autonomy and exploration.

AND

The need for protection, security, comfort, understanding and acceptance.

THE QUEST FOR INDEPENDENCE:

The toddler makes the revolutionary discovery that they have a mind and a body of their own!

Toddlers need to practice autonomy and exploration to develop a sense of their SELF.

Toddlers are learning to be separate individuals who can exert control over themselves and others.

1. SELF-CENTEREDNESS:

-Toddlers are so busy discovering their separateness that they largely focus only on their own needs and desires.

-They are egocentric and too little to even understand this.

-They have trouble seeing another person's perspective, and are too little to even understand this concept.

2. NEGATIVITY:

-“NO” becomes a favorite word. It is the toddler's “Declaration of Independence.”

-“NO” is a way for a toddler to exert his own thoughts and feelings.

-This testing of authority is usually healthy and vital, an essential part of SELF building.

-“NO” is the toddler's code word for “I'm a separate person!”

-Toddlers dislike having their exploration and sense of mastery interfered with!

-Toddlers can feel so exhilarated by their new found independence that they sometimes become enraged when you tell them what to do!

3. STUBBORNESS:

-Toddlers are **LONG ON WILL, SHORT ON SKILL!**

-Toddlers are thrilled to learn that they can have control of themselves, do things for themselves, and make their own choices.

-Toddlers don't like people interfering with their new abilities!

-Limit testing is sometimes triggered by the need to control.

4. INTOLERANCE FOR FRUSTRATION:

-Toddlers want their needs and desires met immediately.

-They do not have the capacity to understand or control their feelings yet.

-They are easily overwhelmed with feelings, especially when they are determined to do something.

-Temper tantrums are often triggered by frustration.

5. SENSELESSNESS:

-Toddlers live for the moment and have limited reasoning abilities. They have trouble understanding the consequences of their behavior.

-In their search for independence and selfhood they don't understand the impact of their behaviors.

-Because toddlers are so busy experiencing newfound abilities and feelings that are at times overwhelming, it is often hard for adults to understand the why and what of their behavior.

THE NEED FOR PROTECTION, SECURITY, COMFORT, UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE

Despite the need for independence, all children of all ages need their parents to be their "SAFE HAVEN".

Your child depends on you to encourage and guide him through his need for independence and exploration, and also to help him understand and appropriately express his feelings. Children of all ages need to be able to count on their parents for comfort and reassurance. Children, just like adults, love to feel understood, and accepted!

**TODDLERS ARE WONDERFUL, COMPLEX,
CHALLENGING LITTLE PEOPLE!!!!!!**

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. **PROXIMITY**: Move close to your child, squat to their eye level and engage in eye to eye contact to get their attention.
2. **ADDRESS YOUR CHILD**: Begin with your child's name if necessary and use a calm, kind and if necessary, firm voice.
3. **STAY BRIEF**: Use your child's developmental age to guide you...don't overtalk it. Save some energy for listening!
4. **BE POSITIVE**: If possible think of a way to phrase a request in a positive and enforceable way.
5. **SPEAK WITH RESPECT**: Model good manners and be as courteous as you like people to be with you.
6. **AVOID THREATS AND ACCUSATIONS**: Listen and acknowledge feelings before you set consequences. Kids on the defensive shut off communication.
7. **SEND "I MESSAGE"**: Describe what you see, how it made you feel (if appropriate), and what you would like to see happen next.
8. **CALM DOWN**: All people communicate more effectively when they are settled down.
9. **DEVELOP YOUR LISTENING SKILLS**: The most important ingredient in effective communication is the ability to be a good listener.

*Active Listening- When children talk, they, like all of us, want to be understood from their point of view. Learn to listen for feelings. Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal cues. What are the words or behaviors really communicating?

*Empathic Responses- This means putting yourself in their shoes...trying to mirror their feelings. Listen with your full attention and encourage them to communicate and understand their feelings with phrases like, "Mmm....I think I know what you mean...I see....I wonder..." Attempt to interpret or guess if necessary..."I wonder if...Sounds like...maybe..." "Looks like that made you feel mad..."

*Give their feelings a name and be willing to keep processing if you are way off target The important part is that they know you are trying to see the world from their viewpoint and that you are willing to accept their feelings even if you don't like the behavior.

10. **PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH**: Children are more cooperative when adults use the skills of effective communication with them, and model these skills in their daily interactions with others.

THE CHILDREN'S CENTER

Listed below are some positive phrases that can be used in helping to motivate your child to respond to your wishes.

IT IS BETTER TO SAY:

Sit down when you slide.
Let's dig in the sand.
Let's sit in the swing.
Use both hands when you slide.
Climb down the ladder.
Let's keep the puzzle on the table.
Please use your inside voice.
Turn the page carefully.
Wipe your hands on the paper towel.
~~Let me hold the ladder.~~
We sit on chairs.
Move back on your rug, there...
Wipe your brush on the jar.
We all put aprons on.
Time to go inside now.
Wash your hands.
Drink your milk.

THAN:

Don't stand up when you slide.
Don't throw the sand.
Don't stand in the swing.
You'll fall if you don't watch out.
Don't jump off the box.
Don't dump the puzzle pieces on the floor.
Don't shout/yell.
Don't tear the book.
Don't put your hand on anything.
Be careful, you might fall.
Don't rock on your chair.
Don't lean forward so that the other children can't see.
Don't drip paint on the floor.
Don't you want to put an apron on?
Shall we go outside?
Don't you want to wash your hands?
Don't you want your milk?

* Remember - State your request. Don't phrase it as a question.