

TERRIFIC TODDLERS

Toddlerhood (kids approximately 14 to 36 months of age) is a stage that often frustrates parents and caregivers. Toddlers have unique developmental characteristics and thinking strategies that influence their behavior. The more you know about your toddler, the more you will enjoy this exciting stage!

- Toddlers need to “individuate” or see themselves as separate from their parents. They do this by saying “no,” by not doing what is asked, or by doing what is not acceptable.
- Toddlers are trying to understand how the world works. They need to throw, bang, touch, dump, squeeze, etc., in order to store valuable information in the brain. They are not trying to be destructive or drive you crazy.
- Toddlers have little understanding of how others feel. They don't yet know that hitting, biting and scratching hurts other people. When toddlers play together, there is usually quite a lot of physical aggression.
- Most toddlers do not spend much time playing alone. They are either moving and exploring, or wanting to be with you. Spending time each day playing with your toddler will provide ideas for play. Expect him or her to “touch base” throughout the day. Your toddler will need to come back to you; often to lean against you, lay in your lap or hang onto your leg. These moments of physical closeness give him or her the confidence to continue exploring and learning.
- Limited language creates frustration. Toddlers know what they want and have strong feelings, but don't have the words to express themselves. This can result in tantrums, night terrors and elaborate security rituals.
- Toddlers are curious, active and impulsive. There is so much they need to learn! They don't have the self-control to stop and think about the consequences before they do something.
- Toddlers love making things happen. When an adult puts a disc in the DVD, then pushes a button to make it pop out, the toddler wants to do it, too! He doesn't understand that putting all his or her toy animals in there will damage the machine!
- Toddlers learn by repetition. They need to do things over

and over in order to learn and remember. This means unacceptable things, too!

- Toddlers learn by imitation and will try anything they see you do including things that are dangerous — dial the phone, start the car, plug in the curling iron. Because they have little understanding of danger, they must be supervised constantly! Childproof your home again, remembering that your toddler is now on his or her feet and can reach higher.
- Toddlers look for a predictable response. If dad jumped out of his chair yesterday when he or she tried to stick a toy in the outlet, will he do it again today? Toddlers don't repeat unacceptable behaviors to be naughty, but to try to predict what will happen.
- Some of the negative behavior of this stage can be related to teething. Many toddlers are cutting large teeth like molars and eye teeth. That would be enough to make any of us cranky!
- Toddlers are egocentric. Because of their stage of development, they believe their wants and needs are the most important and they are not yet able to understand that others have rights, too. This is why sharing is so hard for a toddler. Try teaching the concept of “trading” first. If your toddler wants another child's toy, find something for him or her to “trade.”
- Toddlers need lots of attention and eye contact. If they don't get it, they will resort to unacceptable behavior to get you to pay attention. Electronic screens (TV, computer, texting, electronic games) take attention away from your toddler. Limit your use of these devices around your toddler.

Be calm and patient with your toddler. Use “no” only for really important things. Instead of spanking or slapping hands, say what he or she CAN do; “you need to use gentle hands to touch your friends.” Redirect him to an appropriate activity when he or she misbehaves. Let your toddler see how delighted you are with him or her by smiling, praising and hugging.

For more parenting information,
contact the Family Life Education
Office at 605-322-3660.