



What You Can Do to Support Babies' Brain Development From 12 to 18 Months

Language

Between 13 and 20 months, a toddler's brain is able to process speech more quickly. This makes it possible for young children to better understand what is being said to them. The ability to hear words and understand their meaning is called "receptive language." The process of speaking is called "expressive language." At this age, children understand more of what is being said to them than they are able to say themselves. Beginning around 12 months, a child's babbling will gradually transform into her first "words."

Show your interest and excitement at each toddler's attempts to communicate. Try to figure out what they are telling you. Listen to their tone of voice: Are they asking a question, sharing an idea, voicing a protest? Watch them: Are they pointing? Looking at something specific? Use these clues to figure out what your toddlers want to tell you.

Get down to the toddler's eye level and make eye contact when talking. Talk about the things children see and hear in the world around them.

Talk about what children are doing as they are doing it. For example, "Oh look at you picking up that big block."

Talk about what you are doing. For instance, "Miss Kathy is wiping the tables down for lunch. Want to help?"

Say it again and again. Toddlers love repetition and it helps them learn new words. Repeat favorite songs, rhymes, and stories.

Read books with the children every day. You can start sharing books that tell a story. Make the reading as interactive as possible. Ask them to point to familiar objects they see in the books and to "read" the passages they have memorized along with you. Reading is one of the best ways to help build young children's language and thinking skills.



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Social-Emotional Development

The 12–18-month period is a time when self-control is just beginning to develop. For example, even when the toddler “knows” that grabbing a toy from the hands of a peer is unacceptable, he may not be able to stop himself. You can assist toddlers by:

- Being patient,
- Providing age-appropriate limits, and
- Helping toddlers learn how to control their emotions (“Anthony, I know you’re mad, but you cannot hit. Hitting hurts. I will help you get the truck back from Tyler, and we can get him a different one to use.”)

Help toddlers learn to cope with frustrating situations. Stop the toddlers’ unacceptable behavior, validate their feelings, then show them what they *can* do to express themselves in appropriate ways. Teach them how to ask for help, and so on.

Create age-appropriate consequences to the toddler's behavior. For example, “I know you want the red bowl, but it is Damon’s turn to use it. I put your crackers in the blue bowl.” If the child “acts out,” such as dumps the crackers out or has a tantrum, take the bowl away and let her know she can have another chance to try again in a few minutes. It is important to give young children the opportunity to make a better choice and experience the positive consequences of cooperating.

Look for patterns in the toddlers’ behavior. Children tend to tantrum when they are tired, hungry, or upset. Watch them closely to learn what times of day might be difficult for some children to handle. Drop off at child care is challenging for some, whereas transition times (e.g., between lunch and nap) are hard for others.

Keep love and limits separate. Set limits matter-of-factly so that the children see that your feelings and love for them are totally separate from implementing the rules. When adults are emotional while limit setting, especially when they are angry or rejecting, the child often becomes upset and overwhelmed, making it difficult for him to learn from the situation and eventually learn and follow the rules.

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Thinking Skills

The best type of learning environment for young toddlers is one that allows them to explore and play safely. Young toddlers do not require formal “teaching” to develop thinking skills. They need you to listen attentively, and talk and play with them throughout the day. At about 12 months, toddlers begin to think in more complex ways. For example, they will spend time using objects as tools: If you give them a plastic child-size rake, they might use it to reach the toy that rolled under the couch. Toddlers will also begin to experiment with objects to see what they can do. For example, they will throw a ball to the ground and see that it bounces, then throw a doll to see what it will do.

Show interest in the children's play and follow their lead. Notice which activities really engage their interest and attention.

Provide opportunities to explore and play with interesting and challenging materials. Offer young toddlers objects (such as blocks, simple puzzles, water and sand play, nesting toys, and child-size pots and pans) that encourage them to manipulate, interact, or figure something out.

Build a strong relationship with each toddler in your care. When they can depend on you, they feel safer and more confident about exploring, which helps them learn.

Allow toddlers to make choices, within limits. For example, let them choose a pear or an apple for dessert, or red or blue paint for their picture.

Focus on the process of play and not on the final product. Learning takes place as children figure out how to hold a paintbrush or stack the blocks. Whether they paint an actual “picture” or build a successful tower is not important.

Movement

Walking is one of the most exciting milestones children achieve in the second year of life. As babies take those first steps, you may notice a stiffness and clumsiness to their movements. With practice, they begin to step more smoothly and confidently. As their muscles get stronger, their balance improves. At the same time, the motor pathways in the brain and spinal cord are getting better at controlling and coordinating the movements needed for walking.

Provide a variety of toys that can be pushed and pulled. Shopping carts, doll strollers, and small wagons are good options. Offer riding toys that can be moved with the feet. Provide baskets or buckets that can be filled, dumped, and carried.

Make sure there are plenty of safe, low places for climbing. Babies should be able to climb under, over, inside of, on top of, and around all kinds of places.