



What You Can Do to Support Babies' Brain Development From 24 to 36 Months

Language

Sometimes caregivers and children do not share the same home language. The good news is that toddlers are capable of learning two languages at the same time, as long as they have a close relationship with the adults who are communicating to them in the different languages. For example, the parents speak English at home to the child and you speak Spanish to them while in care, or vice versa. (Or, mom might speak one language to the child while dad speaks another.) Consistency is the key. The toddler needs a reliable language partner when speaking and learning each language.

Remember: Toddlers exposed to two languages are dealing with two very different systems of communication. While they are capable of doing this, their progress in each may appear a bit slower than if they were communicating in only one language.

Communicate with families about their goals.

Different families may have different goals for language learning.

Talk with toddlers during your nurturing activities. For example, when you change a diaper or while dressing respond to their sounds and words, and listen to what they have to say.

Share your home language with toddlers. You can sing songs or tell stories while welcoming children's home languages as well. Invite family members to your home to sing or read a story or rhyme in the toddler's language.

Use a variety of ways to communicate. You can use words, gestures, and facial expressions. Be patient as children try to understand and practice new words and phrases.

Thinking Skills

Young toddlers don't need "academic" activities (e.g., doing worksheets or using flashcards with numbers, letters, and colors) in order to learn. Young children learn through exploration of their world with loving parents, caregivers, and peers. As you talk, sing, touch, move with, play, and listen to the children in your care, you are helping them learn. When you provide play experiences that give toddlers the chance to problem solve, wonder about and explore how things work, talk and interact with you and their peers, develop self-care skills, and engage in physical activity, you are supporting their growing minds.

Develop a trusting, affectionate relationship with each child. By establishing such a relationship, you will help children feel safe, confident, and loved.

Allow plenty of time for play. Play allows toddlers to learn to solve problems, make choices, develop skills, and learn concepts.

Ask lots of questions. "Why do you think the tower keeps falling? Why do dogs bark?" This helps children hone their ideas and become good problem solvers. Having the "right" answer is not the goal. What's most important at this age is to get the children's "wheels turning."

Follow the children's lead and provide just enough support to help them master new skills. The goal is to let children figure things out and do as much as they can on their own. Your job is to provide the help they need to keep working on a difficult task. This helps them learn to solve problems and hang in there when they face challenges. Try to find a balance between providing support while not "taking over" their play.



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Social-Emotional Development

The two's really don't have to be so terrible. It's all a matter of perspective. Yes, 2-year-olds can be very challenging. But look at the world from their point of view. They understand that they are separate from others and have their own thoughts and feelings that they want to assert. They are trying to figure out "Who am I?" and defining themselves over and over with the word "Mine!"

Toddlers are also just starting to learn about self-control, so they have very little of it, especially when experiencing strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or jealousy. It is not unusual for children to express their feelings by hitting, kicking, shoving, or biting. Learning to recognize strong emotions and manage them in acceptable ways is an ongoing process that children will continue to develop through the preschool years.

Anticipate challenging times or interactions. Watch carefully as the children play together. This helps you learn to anticipate when a particular child is having (or about to have) trouble. You can often jump in to distract or intervene before an aggressive act occurs.

Help toddlers identify their feelings. Label them with words such as *angry*, *upset*, *happy*, and *sad*.

Help toddlers connect their feelings and actions. For example, you might say, "Marcus, it is not okay to hit Nina. I see you are angry. It is okay to be angry, but it is not okay to hit."

Model ways to share. Toddlers may need help from an adult to guide their behaviors. For example, when David wants the toy that Sam is playing with, you might say, "When Sam is finished, you can have it." Then turn to Sam and say, "It will be David's turn in 5 minutes." (Then set a kitchen timer so that the children have a visual along with your words.)

State and implement clear consequences. For example, "You may not throw the blocks. If you throw the blocks, I will need to put them away for a little while."

Avoid labeling children. Separate your feelings about the child from his behavior. Tell a child matter-of-factly, "No kicking. Kicking hurts." Once the limit is set and enforced, move on to another activity. Continue to act warmly toward the child so he sees that love and limits are totally separate—you still love him even though you don't like the behavior. This is very important. Children tend to fill the roles they think are expected of them. If others send the message that they think the child is bad, he is more likely to misbehave.



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Movement

Between 2 and 3 years, the brain's pathways are able to transmit messages faster and more clearly. As a result, toddlers are gaining better control and coordination over fine movements such as handling a paintbrush or crayon; using a spoon and fork; holding a cup; buttoning or zipping; and making large movements such as jumping, skipping, pedaling, hopping, and climbing.

During this time, toddlers are developing a preference for either the right or the left hand. You can see a child's preference when you observe which hand she uses to hold an object, throw a ball, wave good-bye, and so on. Children will also show a preference for their right or left foot when they are hopping on one foot or kicking a ball.

Let children try to do things for themselves. They might pour their own milk (from a child-size plastic pitcher), use utensils to eat, put on their shoes, button or zipper their coat, or wash their own hands. They may need some help getting started, but allow them time to work on each task on their own. Their efforts build skills and confidence.

Provide toys and activities that require the use of fingers and hands. Some ideas include: finger painting; painting with brushes; playing with play dough; drawing with crayons, markers, or pencils; doing puzzles; building with blocks; playing with toys with buttons to press; stringing chunky beads; playing musical instruments; and playing dress up.

Provide plenty of time for toddlers to use the large muscles in their arms, legs, and trunk. Allow time for daily indoor/outdoor play such as dancing, running, jumping, hopping, and climbing.