



from Baby to **BIG Kid**

How Your Child Grows
from *ZERO TO THREE*®

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National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

From Baby to Big Kid showcases children's growth and development each month from birth to 3 years. These resources translate the science of early childhood and offer strategies parents can tailor to their unique family situation and to the needs of their child.

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may expect in your baby during that month
and see some helpful tips!



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 25

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you read the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional.

Your Toddler's Development from 24 to 30 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
I use my body to get me places! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can walk up stairs one foot at a time. • I can walk backward. • I can balance on one foot, which helps me climb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit TV time and get moving. Go on a neighborhood walk. Let your child stop to check out what's interesting to him. • Play "island hop." Line up circles of paper on the floor and help your child jump from one to the next.
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I am getting really good at playing pretend. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can use one object to stand in for another. A shoebox may become a bed for my stuffed hippo. • I laugh at silly things, like the idea that my toy car might go <i>moo</i> instead of <i>beep beep</i>. • Sometimes I get scared. I am getting so good at using my imagination but am not always sure what's real and what's pretend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use pretend play to help your child handle challenging situations. You might act out a story together about meeting a new babysitter. • Let your child lead the play. Ask: <i>Who should I be? What happens next?</i> • Acknowledge your child's fears and explain what is real and pretend. This builds trust and security.
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Month 25

What It's Like for Your Child

Daddy gave me some mashed potato to eat. He said it was yummy. I tried a little on my tongue. Ewww, it was so mushy. It was really yucky in my mouth. I didn't like the way it felt, all soft and globby on my tongue. YUCK. I spit it out. Eccch! No like that! I said. Daddy looked at me: You don't like the potatoes? Is something wrong with them? He took a taste from my spoon. It tastes good to me. Here, have another try. He put the spoon to my mouth and I tasted it again. Ewww, it's too mushy! I spit it out again and gagged this time. I started to cry.

I wonder what's wrong, Dad said. He brushed my cheek with his fingers and gave me a kiss on my head. Sorry, little man. This mashed potato thing is just not agreeing with you. Why don't you eat some meat and I'll figure something out. He came back with a boiled potato. Here's a potato I didn't mash. Let's see if you like that better. He cut it into chunks. I picked up a piece and put it in my mouth. Yummmm. That's much better. It's not mushy at all. More! I said. I picked up another piece and popped it in my mouth. Dad said, Look at that smile! I think boiled potatoes are the winner! Then he helped me count all the pieces I popped into my mouth. We got all the way up to five!

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- Trust in his father (and adaptability) when he gives the mashed potatoes a second try at his dad's coaxing.
- Confidence that he is an effective communicator as he uses gestures and words to express his feelings about the mashed potatoes.
- Persistence, as he tries the potatoes several times and in different forms (mashed vs. boiled).

Language and Thinking Skills:

- Good communication skills as he uses gestures and language to communicate his thoughts and feelings.
- Numbers and counting as he and dad count the pieces of potato he eats.

Physical Skills:

- Development of his fine motor skills (using the small muscles in his hands and fingers) as he lifts the spoon to his mouth and feeds himself chunks of potato. These muscles will be critical for learning how to write when he is a little bigger.
- Sensory awareness—that is, recognizing the difference in texture between mashed and boiled potato.

Did You Know...

Your child is learning a lot from her picture books? Researchers read two groups of young children—18-month-olds and 2-year-olds—picture books that showed a child making a simple rattle in three steps. Two types of books were used, one with color photos and one with colored pencil drawings. After reading the story, the children were given the objects they saw in the picture books and were asked to make a rattle. Two-year-olds were able to remember and copy many of the actions they had seen in the books (as compared to 18-month-olds who had much more difficulty). And children did



When choosing books for your toddler, be sure to include some with photos or realistic pictures of common objects that your child sees in her daily life.

much better copying the actions they had seen in the books with color photos versus pencil drawings.

Reference: Simcock, G., & DeLoache, J. (2006). Get the picture? The effects of iconicity on toddlers' re-enactment from picture books. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 1352-1357.

What the Research Means For You

When choosing books for your toddler, be sure to include some with photos or realistic pictures of common objects that your child sees in her daily life. As you read these stories together, repeat the names of these objects in the book and then find them in your home or neighborhood. This helps your child build the connection between the idea of something (in the book) and the object in "real life." It also builds her vocabulary. Consider making photo books of your child performing daily tasks, like getting ready for bed (photos of bath, getting pajamas on, tooth-brushing, etc). This helps your child see the order of daily events. Sequencing is an important literacy skill and will also help your child begin to understand and anticipate daily routines.

Spotlight on: Making Your Home the Imagination Station

Babies are born learners, with a natural curiosity to figure out how the world works. In the toddler years, you will see your child's curiosity spur her imagination. For example, a 2-year-old has been watching the waitress that she sees at the diner where she eats with her family every Sunday. When she gets home, she sets out toy plates and cups on the sofa. She even takes some paper napkins from the kitchen to put these on her "table." She is curious about imitating all the actions she has seen "real" waitresses perform. This is the beginning of using her imagination in her play—otherwise known as pretend play—a very powerful vehicle for thinking through new ideas and "testing" them out.

Below are some ways to nurture your child's imagination and learning:

- **Let your child explore interesting "stuff."** Unlike some toys that are designed to be used a certain way, materials like boxes, blocks, water, sand, pots, and pans, and any art materials, can be used imaginatively. No need to tell your child what to do with the material or what the finished product should look. Let your child's curiosity and imagination be her guide.
- **Follow your child's lead.** Encourage your child's interests. Your child learns best through activities that capture his attention and imagination. If your toddler likes music, play it for him often, make and play instruments and dance together. If bugs are his thing, give him a shovel and a net. Find books on bugs. And show your *own* interest in the world around you. You are your child's role model for being an eager, curious learner.
- **Use your community's resources.** Take a "field trip" together to the public library and let your toddler choose a book to borrow. You can also check into community-run classes, local nature centers, or parent-child drop-in centers. Many of these activities are low-cost or free of charge and can open up new worlds to your child.
- **Get your child's wheels turning with open-ended questions.** While your child won't be able to answer *Why* or *What do you think* questions at age 2, it's good to get in the habit of asking. Open-ended questions are ones that don't have a clear-cut right or wrong answer, such as: "How do you feel about....."; "What was (such and such experience) like for you?"; "Why do you think (such and




Make up simple stories about where the city bus goes or the adventures of the bulldozer you see at a construction site.

such) happened?"; "Tell me about your favorite part of the book." These kinds of questions encourage your child to develop her own thoughts and ideas. They also give you a window into her inner life—what she's curious about, thinking through, or coping with. Asking your child questions, and listening to the answers, tells her that her ideas are important to you.

- **Create an interesting environment.** Hang photos of your child's artwork at his level. Put some music on while he plays. Give him fun "props" that he can use to act out stories—old towels become superhero capes, a worn-out t-shirt can make him a ghost, a plastic bowl turns into an astronaut helmet. Throw a blanket over a low table and you've made a cave, a house, or a barn. Keep your child's pretend play props in a cardboard "trunk" that the two of you decorate with paint, markers, and glitter.
- **Redirect, don't discourage.** Try to figure out what is capturing your toddler's interest, or what skill she is trying to master, and create a safe and acceptable way for her to explore. For example, if your toddler loves messing around with the house plants, put them out of reach but offer a close alternative. You might put some dirt in a plastic container for your child to play with and inspect outdoors. If she likes to pour the water from her cup onto the high chair or floor, move her to the bathtub or backyard so she can explore and experiment with water without making extra work for you.
- **Tell stories.** As you take a walk together, talk about the ants you see crawling on the ground or the squirrels you see scurry up the trees. Make up simple stories about where the city bus goes or the adventures of the bulldozer you see at a construction site.
- **Make art and music part of your child's life.** Play different types of music—classical, rock, bluegrass, zydeco, rap, gospel, Motown—and see which kind he likes best. Make music with your child using homemade "kitchen" instrument—an empty oatmeal canister can be a drum if you give your child a wooden spoon to bang on top. Be creative about art materials. Let your child scribble with markers, or glue leaves or sticks to paper for a nature collage. He can even roll his favorite toy truck through washable paint and then over a piece of paper you've taped to the table. Encouraging your child to be imaginative with art materials builds his creativity, problem-solving, and fine motor skills (using small muscles in his hands and fingers).

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Ring-a-Ling.** Using a long length of string, hang a bell or a rattle from a low tree branch or a doorframe. Give your child a foam bat or wooden spoon and let her hit the rattle or bell and make a sound. Games like this build hand-eye coordination and muscle strength in your child's arms and shoulders. (Be sure to supervise carefully and put the string away when you are done playing.)
- **Macaroni Matches.** Lay a variety of pasta shapes out on the table (making sure there are matches for each). Pick up a piece of pasta and ask your child, *Do you see a match for this? Is there another one that looks just like it?* Together with your child, match the remaining pasta pieces. If you'd like, you can allow your child to dip each pasta piece in some glue and then place on a sheet of heavy paper to make his own "macaroni art." 



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Month 26

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What It's Like for Your Child

Daddy took me to a new playground today. At first, I felt a little shy. I had never been there before. I didn't know my way around. I didn't know any of the kids. Daddy said, Want to watch for a while? You like it when you can have some time to get a feel for new places. Let's just hang out. He let me stand next to him and check everything out for a few minutes. Then he said, How about we see what they've got here? He held my hand and we walked around. There was a climbing wall, and a tunnel, and a sand box. And there was an amazing slide there that was sooooo high—it was almost as tall as Daddy! After I had a chance to see everything, I felt ready to play.

I started off on the climbing wall. But I kept checking out that slide. I really wanted to try it... but I felt a little scared too. Dad must have seen me eyeing it. He said, Want me to wait at the bottom for you? I nodded and we walked over. I started up the steps. When I got to the top, I felt worried. It was so high. Dad reached up and asked if I wanted to hold his hand while I went down. That was a great idea. Whoosh! Down I went holding his hand! Dad's right—I can do it!

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- Flexibility and coping with change when his dad takes him to a new park and he gets to know a new place.
- Reassurance that his Dad will let him explore this park at his own pace and that it is okay to take things slow.
- Trust that Dad will help him with his goal of going down the big slide, even though he is fearful.
- Awareness of his own feelings when his Dad puts into words his preference to take things slow and offers him his hand for reassurance.
- How to accept support when his dad helps him “conquer” the slide.

Language and Thinking Skills:

- How to ask for help when he tells his father he is afraid to go down the slide.
- Concepts like height and speed which are part of the experience of going down the slide.

Physical Skills:

- How to use the large muscles in his legs, arms and shoulders to climb up the ladder.
- Coordination and balance as he climbs the stairs and then slides down and lands at the bottom.

Did You Know...

That the way you respond to your child's behavior influences whether she repeats it? Researchers watched how a small group of 10 mothers reacted to their 2-year-olds' behavior. They found that parents used two main strategies for responding when children did something they weren't supposed to: Distraction (trying to shift their child's attention to a more acceptable activity or toy) or limit-setting (which involved telling



Starting from day one, a child learns who he is through his interactions with parents and caregivers.

the children what they could/could not do). Researchers found that limit-setting, as a first step, was most effective in motivating children to stop the unwanted behavior. Distraction *after* limit-setting was also effective.

However, distraction alone was not a successful strategy. Why? Researchers believe when parents tell their children what the limit is, they are giving children important information about what the misbehavior is and what the parent's expectations are. It gives children the "rules of the game." Distraction *after* that helps children get refocused on another, more acceptable activity.

Reference: Reid, M. J., O'Leary, S. G., & Wolff, L. S. (1994). *Effects of maternal distraction and reprimands on toddlers' transgressions and negative affect*. Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Washington, DC.

What the Research Means For You

Setting clear limits—around safety, health (like hand-washing after toileting), and acceptable behavior—is important for a growing toddler. However, toddlers still have very short attention spans and very little self-control. They also can't remember rules over the long-term yet. This means that you may need to set the same limit many times for many more months before your toddler finally "gets" it. Remember, your toddler is not purposefully defying or trying to "get you." She's just learning what behavior is and isn't okay in your family. That's why the second step—distraction—is critical, since it shows your child what she *can* do. So if your little one loves nothing more than to dig in your potted plants, give her a shovel and a bucket and take her outside where she can dig to her heart's content.

Spotlight on: Making Your Home the Imagination Station

Confidence is a belief in your ability to master your body, behavior, and the challenges you encounter in the larger world and is an essential ingredient for your child's healthy development. It is also a key factor for school success. Children who are confident are eager to learn new skills and face new challenges. They also expect adults to be helpful and supportive of their efforts.

Self-confidence is also crucial for getting along with others and working out everyday social challenges—such as sharing and making friends. Self-confident children believe they are likeable and expect others to be likeable too.

How does self-confidence develop? Starting from day one, a child learns who he is through his relationships and interactions with primary caregivers. Parents, relatives, child care providers and teachers reflect back to children their unique strengths and special attributes. In large part, a child's sense of confidence is shaped and nurtured by everyday experiences with those who care for him.

Here are several important ways that you can nurture your child's self-confidence through your everyday interactions together.

1. Establish routines with your child. When events are predictable, happening in approximately the same way at approximately the same time each day, it helps your child feel safe, secure, confident, and in control of his world. He knows that, for example, bath comes first, then books, then a song, and then bedtime. Understanding what will happen next helps him prepare for those changes. If day-to-day events seem to occur



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randomly, children can't predict what is likely to come next and may feel out of control, causing a sense of worry or uncertainty. When children know what to expect, or have learned they can depend on you to give them notice about a change, they are free to play, grow, and learn.

2. Make sure your child has lots of time to play. Play is how children learn about themselves, other people, and the world around them. Through play, children also develop confidence—when they find the ball behind the couch, get the right plastic shape into its hole, or make the jack in the box pop up.

It is also through play that children learn how it feels to be in another's shoes as they try on new roles and also work through complicated feelings. A 2-year old who dresses up, playing a mommy going off to work, may be working out her feelings about separations. A 3-year old playing superheroes may be practicing being more assertive, mastering fears, or venting feelings of fear or anger. Let your child lead playtime—this will build her confidence, assertiveness, and leadership skills.

3. Help your child learn to be a problem-solver. Help your child work through problems rather than solving them for her. Show her how to arrange the blocks on the bottom of the tower so they provide a secure base, then let her figure out how to make it balance. This way you give her the chance to use her own thinking skills and feel successful.

The goal is to guide and support your child in her problem-solving efforts but not do for her what she has the skills to accomplish herself. Sometimes, your child's times of greatest frustration are golden opportunities for her to develop new skills and along the way build her self-confidence, competence, and mastery. She'll learn that she can depend on you to encourage and guide her in finding a solution.

4. Give your child responsibilities. Feeling useful and needed makes children feel important and builds confidence. Jobs should be age appropriate. Very young children can sort laundry with you, help feed pets, water plants, sponge off the table, put napkins down, or pick up toys. Be specific about what you need your child to do: *Please put a napkin on each plate*, versus, *Help me set the table*.

5. Celebrate your child's successes. Recognizing your child's accomplishments helps build his confidence. Snap a photo or write a note on the calendar when your child pedals a tricycle for the first time, or when he goes down the big slide at the park. At mealtime or before bed, talk about what your child did that day or is learning to do: *Today you worked so hard on catching the ball. It was so much fun playing with you.*

6. Encourage your child to keep at the tasks he is struggling with. Children learn by doing. Break down difficult tasks into manageable steps to help your toddler feel confident and successful. If your child is trying to get his shoes on, you can help him unlace his shoes and open them, line them up so he can step in, and let him lean on you as he steps in.

As you work on a task or skill that is tough for your child, let him know that that you will not be disappointed if he isn't ready yet. You are there to support him whenever he wants to try again. This encourages him to find his own motivation to succeed rather than doing it to please or win the admiration of others.



Model the kinds of behaviors that you want your child to develop. Use words to help her understand what you did to manage a challenge.

7. Talk about experiences to help your child make sense of them. Prompt your child to find solutions to dilemmas. *You did a great job trying to pour your own juice. Some juice is in the cup. Some spilled. You look sad about that. It's okay. Spills happen when you're learning to pour. Here, you can wipe it up with this sponge. That pitcher is heavy for little hands. I'll give you a smaller one and you can try again.*

8. Be a role model for your child. Your child is always watching you for clues about what to do or how to feel about different situations. Your reactions help your child learn how to handle emotions like sadness, anger, or frustration, and how to solve problems or deal with challenges. So model the kinds of behaviors that you want your child to develop. Use words to help her understand what you did to manage a challenge: *This toy is so hard to put together! It keeps coming apart which is so frustrating. I'm going to take a break. When I felt more calm, I will give it another try.*

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

Chalk Talk. Take your child outside to draw with chalk on a sidewalk or patio. (If you are near a street, be sure to closely supervise your child.) Name the different colors of chalk and talk about what your child is drawing. (*Look at the straight line you drew...and now you've added a circle!*) When your child is done, let her spray a hose or pour a bucket of water over the chalk. What happens? You can adapt this activity for winter weather by using colored water in a spray bottle over the snow. Games like this build your child's language and writing skills, and also teach her about cause-and-effect (like the fact that water makes chalk drawings fade away).

Special Delivery! Cover three shoeboxes with different colors of construction paper—blue, red, and yellow. Then cut six shapes (two from each color paper: red, blue, and yellow); these will become your child's "mail." Give your child a marker to "write" on each of the letters. Offer stickers as "stamps" for the letters. Then let your child place the letters around the house. Put your three shoebox mailboxes in a row. Give your child a grocery bag or old purse to collect the letters, then help him sort the mail by color into the matching mailbox. Games like this build writing skills, language skills (the names of the colors), and the ability to notice and match similar objects—a problem-solving skill. 🌻



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Month 27

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What It's Like for Your Child

I love playing in the sandbox! As soon as we get to the park, I run over, get in, and grab a shovel. But—oh no—sand is in my shoe and it doesn't feel good inside my sock. It's itchy and weird and I want these shoes off now! I shake my foot and tell my babysitter, Sand! Take off! She says, That's fine, go ahead and take your shoes off. She watches me as I pull the Velcro fasteners and gives me a hand when I get stuck pulling off my sock. She says, Nice job. You took off your own shoes. I feel good that I could do it myself and it is much better with bare feet in the sand. The sand feels cool and tickly on my toes. I start to dig and fill up my bucket with sand. My babysitter says, Full! Then I pour it out, and she says Empty! I put more sand in and stir it with my shovel. I hand it to her and say, Here's soup! She scoops some up with another shovel and pretends to slurp it: Yummy! You are a good cook!

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- Confidence, when he is successful at taking off his shoes
- Relationship-building as he enjoys playtime with his babysitter
- Sharing and turn-taking as they play “sand soup” and explore the sand box together

Language and Thinking Skills:

- The concept of opposites like *full/empty* and *warm* (foot in shoe)/*cool* (bare foot in sand)
- Pretend play skills when he stirs her “soup” and offers some to her babysitter
- Problem-solving as he figures out how to take off his shoes
- To use words to ask for help (*Sand! Take off!*), to engage his babysitter in a pretend play story (*Here's soup!*), and to describe his observations and discoveries (*empty/full*).

Physical Skills:

- Development of his fine motor skills (the small muscles in her hands and fingers) when he removes his shoes and pours sand

Did You Know...

Parents report that their children's challenging behaviors peak at 27 months of age? And it may come as no surprise that the number one most challenging behavior reported by parents was...whining.

Reference: O'Brien, M. (1996). Child-rearing difficulties reported by parents of infants and toddlers. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 21(3), 433-446. Available online: <http://jpepsy.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/21/3/433.pdf>

What the Research Means For You

While whining can be hard to take, it's quite common at this age as toddlers are experiencing newfound independence, growing language skills, and a desire to explore, do, and go, go, go. They know what they want and they want it NOW! Unfortunately “NOW” isn't always possible, so they get cranky. The result: Whining.



Give your child lots of opportunities to feel successful by offering small, achievable challenges.

What can you do? Start by telling your child that you know she wants to tell you something but you don't understand what she's saying when she's whining. When she can tell you in her big girl voice, you will respond. If you cannot meet her request at the time, clearly and matter-of-factly (without anger) validate her feelings (*I know it's hard to wait*) and explain the situation: *I cannot play right now. I will play with you once I have cleaned the table and washed these dishes.*

If she keeps whining, you can offer a distraction (*Would you like to help me wipe the table with a sponge?*), or you can set the kitchen timer to show your child how long she has to wait before you can play with her. Are any of these strategies guaranteed to rid your life of toddler whining? Nope. But the goal is to not reward (give in to) whining, but instead help your child learn how to handle a difficult situation in a better way.

Spotlight on: Helping Your Child Learn Persistence

Persistence means not giving up when faced with a challenge. It is the ability to cope with frustration and stick with a difficult task. While children are born with a motivation to explore and learn, it is persistence that helps them accomplish their goals:

A 2-year-old carefully stacks one block on top of another to make a tower. He experiments with which blocks form the most solid base and considers how best to balance the blocks as the tower gets taller. This toddler is learning what steps are involved in making his goal a reality through careful planning and persistence.

Here are some ideas for encouraging children to persist toward their goals:

- **Ask children questions to help them solve problems on their own.** *Now that you've filled the bucket up with sand, it's heavy and hard to lift. Hmmm. What do you think we should do?* Questions like these help guide your child in using logical thinking skills to solve a problem and reach her goal.
- **Point out how children's actions helped them achieve a goal.** Notice the steps involved in achieving a goal. (And try to avoid *only* praising successes.) Comment on your child's play, and be sure to leave time for your child to respond: *I see how carefully you balanced the blocks on top of one another... You made a strong base for your tower. Good thinking.*
- **Support your child in his attempts to master new skills.** For example, you might offer your toddler a small plastic pitcher and let him pour his own milk into the cereal bowl. (Have a sponge handy.) Let your child know that you're proud of him for trying hard by noticing his efforts: *You got your shirt off all by yourself.* If your child gets frustrated and starts to give up, validate his feelings: *Getting the puzzle piece in the right space can be really tough!* Then, offer suggestions or assistance to help him keep at it without doing it for him.
- **Encourage your child to try new tasks.** Watch her to see what she seems ready to tackle, perhaps getting on her own shoes or attaching one train to another. Tell her it may take a few tries, but you believe she can do it. Just be sure your expectations are age appropriate. When you ask your child to do something she is not ready to do, she may experience feelings of failure or incompetence and worry about disappointing you. This may make her reluctant to try new things. Instead, offer your child lots of opportunities to feel successful by offering small, achievable challenges. If your child is easily frustrated, break up more difficult tasks into manageable parts.



If your child is challenged by an activity and becomes extremely frustrated and distressed, he may have reached his limit and needs a break. He may also need a little more assistance from you.

- **Model persistence.** Let your child see you attempting new things and persisting even when the task becomes difficult or frustrating. Share your thinking process: *Boy, getting this jar open is really tough. I'm feeling pretty frustrated. Let me try it this way...*
- **Partner with your child when frustrations are high.** If your child is challenged by an activity and becomes extremely frustrated and distressed, he may have reached his limit and needs a break. He may also need a little more assistance from you. Recognize his effort: *You worked on that puzzle for a long time. Do you want me to help or do you want to try later?* Avoid showing any disappointment as this may lead to worry that he is displeasing you. When he is ready to start again, sit down with him and give him some pointers or guidance to get him moving toward a solution.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Crazy for Daisies.** Gather a selection of plastic or silk flowers and a small Styrofoam block (supplies available at craft stores). Show your toddler how she can stick a flower into the Styrofoam and let her create her own flower arrangement. Talk with your child about her favorite flowers, the colors of the flowers, which flowers are tall or short, big or small, the names of the flowers (rose, daisy, etc.) and their different parts (stem, leaf, petal). Activities like this build your child's creativity, problem-solving, and language skills.
- **Your Little Engine That Could.** Pretend your child is "the little engine that could." (You can find a copy of this story at your local library to share with your child). After reading, have your child stand in front of you and put your hands on her shoulders. She is the engine, and you are the caboose. Make up different obstacles for her to overcome as the two of you chug through the house or yard—*Here comes a tall mountain; can you make it over? Here is a wide river; can you cross the bridge?* Together, the two of you can say, *I think I can, I think I can.* Games like this encourage children to solve problems, build their imaginations, instill confidence, and develop muscle strength and coordination. 🌀



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 28

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you read the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional.

Your Toddler's Development from 24 to 30 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
I use my body to get me places! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can walk up stairs one foot at a time. • I can walk backward. • I can balance on one foot, which helps me climb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit TV time and get moving. Go on a neighborhood walk. Let your child stop to check out what's interesting to him. • Play "island hop." Line up circles of paper on the floor and help your child jump from one to the next.
I am using language to tell you what I'm feeling and thinking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can make longer sentences like, <i>More juice!</i> • My favorite words might be <i>no</i>, <i>me</i>, and <i>mine</i>. I may get overwhelmed by my strong feelings and need your help to calm down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about what you are doing together. Ask her about her ideas: <i>What part of the book did you like?</i> • Acknowledge feelings and teach social skills at the same time: <i>I know the doll stroller is your favorite toy. But Thomas would like a turn pushing it.</i> • Stay calm when your child is having a tantrum. This helps her learn to calm herself—an important life skill.
I am getting really good at playing pretend. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can use one object to stand in for another. A shoebox may become a bed for my stuffed hippo. • I laugh at silly things, like the idea that my toy car might go <i>moo</i> instead of <i>beep beep</i>. • Sometimes I get scared. I am getting so good at using my imagination but am not always sure what's real and what's pretend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use pretend play to help your child handle challenging situations. You might act out a story together about meeting a new babysitter. • Let your child lead the play. Ask: <i>Who should I be? What happens next?</i> • Acknowledge your child's fears and explain what is real and pretend. This builds trust and security.
I want to make friends but still need help with sharing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like watching other children and might copy what I see them do. • I may have one or two best friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your child regular chances to play with children his age. This will help him develop important social skills while having fun. • Be patient with conflicts around sharing and turn-taking. Toddlers need help with their growing social skills



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 28

What It's Like for Your Child

Mommy and I were reading my favorite book. It's about a kid just like me who takes a walk with his red wagon. In the story, the boy sees a bird while they walk to the park. I got up and ran to the window, dragged my stool over, and climbed up. I pointed outside: Bird! Look, Mama! She said, I see the bird too...just like in our story. I went back to Mommy's lap and turned the pages of the book. We read the whole thing. Then I grabbed Mommy's hand and took her outside. I showed her my red wagon—just like the one in the story. I hid behind the wagon and then jumped up and said, Peek-a-boo! I go walk? Mommy laughed. She said, You surprised me, Mr. Peek-a-boo! Hey, do you want to be just like the boy in the story? Okay, let's take a walk. How about we go to the park, too? I laughed: Yay, Mama! Go go!

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- Relationship skills as he enjoys reading and playing with his mother
- To use humor, such as when he jumps up to surprise his mother with *Peek-a-boo!*

Language and Thinking Skills:

- Words to describe what he sees outside
- Language and gestures to make a request when he walks his mother to the wagon and asks, *I go walk?*
- Symbolic thinking skills when he makes the connection between a symbol (the pictures of a bird and wagon in the story) and the “real” bird and wagon at his house
- Pretend play skills when he wants to take on the “role” of the boy in the story by taking a walk with the wagon just like they do in the book

Physical Skills:

- Large motor skills as he uses the muscles in his legs and arms when he runs, climbs, and jumps
- Fine motor skills as he uses the small muscles in his hands and fingers to turn the pages of the book

Did You Know...

Your 28-month-old can reliably remember events, even up to 3 months after they happen? A group of twenty, 28-month-old children participated in a play experience with researchers. Some returned to the laboratory 2 weeks later; some returned 3 months later. Upon their return, researchers determined how well the children remembered details of their previous play experience by asking them to re-enact it. What surprised researchers was that both groups of toddlers recalled their experience equally well. It didn't matter whether children came back after 2 weeks or 3 months.

Reference: Fivush, R., & Hamond, N. R. (1989 April). Time and again: Effects of repetition and retention interval on 2 year olds' event recall. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 47(2), 259-273.



Help your child make connections between past and current experiences. This nurtures her memory and helps her learn how to make logical predictions.

What the Research Means For You

You may be surprised when you go to the supermarket and your child reminds you that the last time you were there, you got her a cookie in the bakery. And, by the way, can she have one this time too? Memory is crucial for learning and for making sense of the world—its people, objects, and rules. You help build your child's memory when you:

- **Talk about her day.** This helps her put events in sequence and see how they are related. (*Do you remember when we took our walk today, we saw the dogs playing Frisbee at the park?*)
- **Make connections to past events.** *Last month we went to Grandma's house and the two of you planted seeds. Tomorrow we are going to visit her and you will see how your seeds have grown into flowers.* Help your child make connections between past and current experiences. This nurtures her memory and helps her learn how to make logical predictions.
- **Be patient with emerging fears and worries.** Because your child has a more reliable memory now, she may also develop some fears and worries. She remembers the last shot she had at the doctor's office...so doesn't want to go back. She also remembers the dog that always barks at the corner and so is afraid to take a walk past that house. Talking about your child's experiences in a supportive way helps her make sense of and feel in control of them. This gives her the security she needs to move forward.

Spotlight on: Nurturing Early Writing Skills

For very young children, art and early writing skills are one and the same. At first, it's all about just figuring out what these cool things called crayons can do. Then your child discovers the link between his hand holding the crayon and the line he made on the page: Presto! He experiences the power of *cause and effect*. Imagine how exciting this must be for him. He can now make a real "mark" on the world. This leap in thinking skills is helped along by his growing control over the muscles in his hands that lets him move a marker or paintbrush with purpose to reach a goal.

There are four stages of drawing and writing from 15 months old to 3 years of age. Note that the timetables listed below are approximate; your child may master these skills faster or slower and still be developing just fine. Growth doesn't happen at the same speed for every child, but by offering repeated fun experiences with a variety of art and writing materials, you will see forward progress over time.

Stage 1: Random Scribbling (15 months to 2 1/2 years)

This is the period when young children are just figuring out that their movements result in the lines and scribbles they see on the page. These scribbles are usually the result of large movements from the shoulder, with the crayon or marker held in the child's fist. There is joy in creating art at all ages, but at this stage especially, many children relish the feedback they are getting from their senses: the way the crayon feels, the smell of the paint, the squishy-ness of the clay.

For other children, this sensory information may be too much and they may not enjoy some art activities (like finger-painting). As they grow to tolerate more sensory input, you can incrementally re-introduce these kinds of more tactile art activities into their routine.



By age 3, your child begins to understand the difference between pictures and writing.

Stage 2: Controlled Scribbling (2 years to 3 years)

As children develop better control over the muscles in their hands and fingers, their scribbles begin to change and become more controlled. Toddlers may make repeated marks on the page —open circles, diagonal, curved, horizontal, or vertical lines. Over time, children make the transition to holding the crayon or marker between their thumb and pointer finger.

Stage 3: Lines and Patterns (2 1/2 years to 3 1/2 years)

Children now understand that writing is made up of lines, curves, and repeated patterns. They try to imitate this in their own writing. So while they may not write actual letters, you may see components of letters in their drawing. These might include lines, dots and curves. This is an exciting time as your toddler realizes that her drawing conveys meaning! For example, she may write something down and then tell you what word it says. This is an important step toward reading and writing.

Stage 4: Pictures of Objects or People (3 years to 5 years)

The ability to hold an image in one's mind and then represent it on the page is a very important thinking skill that children are mastering at this age. You will see preschoolers creating a picture and then labeling their masterpiece with the names of people, animals, or objects they are familiar with.

Once your child has begun to purposefully draw images, he has mastered symbolic thinking. This important milestone in thinking skills means that your child understands that drawings on paper can be a symbol for something else, like a house, a cat, or a person. At this stage, your child also begins to understand the difference between pictures and writing. So you may see him draw a picture and then scribble some "words" underneath to describe what he has drawn or to tell a story.

What Can You Do to Encourage Art and Writing Skills:


- **Make art a regular part of playtime.** Offer chunky, easy-to-grip crayons, thick pencils, glue sticks, and washable markers. Cut paper bags up to draw on. Sometimes it helps if you tape the paper down on the table so it doesn't move as they draw. As your child grows, you can include washable paints, child-safe scissors and glue, and homemade salt-dough as part of your child's creative time. Let your child wear an old shirt of yours (with sleeves cut off) as a smock and lay newspaper or an old shower curtain over the table to keep it clean.
- **Avoid instructions.** Let your child experiment and explore. Creativity means being able to express yourself freely. Self-directed activities help your toddler feel confident in expressing his view of the world. By sitting nearby, observing, and taking pleasure in your child's creation, you are providing all the guidance he needs.
- **Notice the process, not just the product.** Focus less on the outcome and more on what your child is *thinking about* her drawing. Take a few moments to look at and describe what you see in your child's work: *Look at the lines you are making—there are so many of them! Or, I see a purple circle. Or, That picture is full of color. It makes me feel bright and happy.* You can also describe what you see as you watch your child create: *You are working really hard on your drawing.* Another option is simply to engage your child by asking: *Tell me about your picture.*



Creative activities can sometimes help children express and make sense of feelings that are too intense for them to talk about.

- **Experiment with a variety of art materials** as your child nears 3. Let children paint with cotton balls, sponges, string—you name it. Give your child crayons and rub over a textured surface (like a coin or a screen). Draw with chalk outside on a sidewalk; see how water changes the color of the chalk. Add powdered paint or glitter to your child's sand play. Or add a new dimension to water play by adding drops of washable food coloring to the water. What happens when you mix two different colors of water together?
- **Use art to help your child express strong feelings.** Is your child having a tantrum? Offer some playdough or set out the markers and paper and suggest she draw just how angry she is. Creative activities can sometimes help children express and make sense of feelings that are too intense for them to talk about.
- **Encourage your child's attempts to write.** If your child scribbles something and then tells you what he "wrote," take it seriously. Let him take his "shopping list" to the supermarket or mail his (scribbled) letter to Grandma. This is how children learn that words are powerful and have meaning.
- **Display your child's art and writing.** This tells your child that her work is valued and important.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Personal Puzzle.** Take a photo of something familiar to your child such as your house, a favorite toy, or a pet. With your child's help, glue the photo to heavy cardboard. Then cut the photo into four large pieces, making your own simple puzzle. See if your child can put the picture back together again. Games like this nurture your child's problem-solving skills, memory, persistence, and fine motor skills (the muscles in the hands and fingers).
- **Paper Bag Predictions.** Have your child help you fill three paper bags with items of different weights and sizes. For example, you can fill one with a small bag of dry rice, another with some feathers. Talk with your child about how each item feels and looks as he puts them in the bag. Then take turns picking up each bag. Talk about whether the bag feels "heavy" or "light." Activities like this help your toddler learn new concepts. 



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 29

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you read the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional.

Your Toddler's Development from 24 to 30 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
I use my body to get me places! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can walk up stairs one foot at a time. • I can walk backward. • I can balance on one foot, which helps me climb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit TV time and get moving. Go on a neighborhood walk. Let your child stop to check out what's interesting to him. • Play "island hop." Line up circles of paper on the floor and help your child jump from one to the next.
I am using language to tell you what I'm feeling and thinking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can make longer sentences like, <i>More juice!</i> • My favorite words might be <i>no</i>, <i>me</i>, and <i>mine</i>. I may get overwhelmed by my strong feelings and need your help to calm down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about what you are doing together. Ask her about her ideas: <i>What part of the book did you like?</i> • Acknowledge feelings and teach social skills at the same time: <i>I know the doll stroller is your favorite toy. But Thomas would like a turn pushing it.</i> • Stay calm when your child is having a tantrum. This helps her learn to calm herself—an important life skill.
I am getting really good at playing pretend. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can use one object to stand in for another. A shoebox may become a bed for my stuffed hippo. • I laugh at silly things, like the idea that my toy car might go <i>moo</i> instead of <i>beep beep</i>. • Sometimes I get scared. I am getting so good at using my imagination but am not always sure what's real and what's pretend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use pretend play to help your child handle challenging situations. You might act out a story together about meeting a new babysitter. • Let your child lead the play. Ask: <i>Who should I be? What happens next?</i> • Acknowledge your child's fears and explain what is real and pretend. This builds trust and security.
I want to make friends but still need help with sharing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like watching other children and might copy what I see them do. • I may have one or two best friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your child regular chances to play with children his age. This will help him develop important social skills while having fun. • Be patient with conflicts around sharing and turn-taking. Toddlers need help with their growing social skills.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 29

What It's Like for Your Child

I was building a block castle with my dad. We were almost done when I started to take it apart, block by block, and arrange the blocks in a straight line. My dad just picked up the blocks I had taken off and put them back on our castle. He didn't get it! I didn't want to build a castle anymore. I told Dad, No! He stopped and said, Well, I thought we were building a castle. So I told him: No. I makin' a road. Daddy said, Ohhhh. Maybe I can make a bridge out of this shoebox top? I loved that idea. We put a car on top of the bridge and finished our road together.

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- Cooperation as he plays with his dad, sharing materials and building a joint creation with blocks
- Managing frustration when he gets annoyed with Dad and then explains to him the change in building plans from castle to road
- Mutual respect and compromise as his father is flexible in adapting the plan
- Leadership skills and self-esteem as his Dad lets him take the lead in how and what they play, letting him know his ideas are important

Language and Thinking Skills:

- To use language to share his thoughts and plans, and to negotiate and compromise
- Problem-solving skills as he figures out how to lay the blocks in order to build the castle and the dragon path
- Creativity, imagination, and pretend play skills, as he creates a kingdom-and-dragon-filled world with his blocks, and as he accepts the shoebox top as a stand-in for a bridge

Physical Skills:

- Fine motor skills as he uses the small muscles in his hands and fingers to pick up and carefully place the blocks on his castle

Did You Know...

That one-third of 29-month-olds are still not sleeping six consecutive hours at night? (This finding is from research was conducted through parent surveys of 1,741 Canadian toddlers.)

Reference: Early childhood sleep patterns. (2005, January). Pediatrics for Parents. Retrieved on July 24, 2008 from: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0816/is_1_22/ai_n15860797



If your toddler wakes at night and calls out or comes to get you, walk her back to her room and put her in her bed with minimal interaction.

What the Research Means For You

While toddlers are growing up in many ways, some still struggle with the ability to soothe themselves at night-time. For every parent who thinks they are alone with their toddler's sleep problems, there is another parent up at 3 a.m., too. The key is to understand why. We all wake up at several points throughout the night and soothe ourselves back to sleep by adjusting our blankets and pillows, and our bodies, to the way we ease into slumber. To help your toddler learn this skill, the first step is to make sure that your child is falling asleep on her own. This means that after your child's bedtime routine, you leave the room while she is still awake, but sleepy. (When you lay down with your toddler until she's asleep, read her stories until she's zonked out, or rub her back until she's in dreamland, she learns to depend on these routines to fall asleep.)

If your toddler wakes at night and calls out or comes to get you, walk her back to her room and put her in her bed with minimal interaction. The more you interact, the more fulfilling the wake-up is to your child. Stick as close as possible to the same bedtime routine and respond in the same way each time your child wakes up. Children are comforted by knowing what to expect. So, for example, tuck her in, remind her that night-time is time for sleep, and leave the room. Keep repeating this routine until your child falls asleep. While the learning curve may involve a few restless nights and tears, with your guidance and consistency, your child will learn to sleep through the night.

Spotlight on: Learning to Use the Toilet

When and how to help your child learn to use the potty depends on how ready your child is. Your beliefs and values about toilet training also matter. There is not one "right" way.

Most children begin to develop control over their bowels and bladder by 18 months. This is necessary for children to *physically* be able to use the toilet. However there are other factors that contribute to when a child is ready to use the potty, such as a family's cultural beliefs or a child's temperament. For example, a child who has a harder time with change may need more time to make the transition to the potty.

Starting to train your child earlier does not mean he will learn to use the potty sooner. One study showed that children whose parents started training them before 27 months took longer to learn to use the potty compared to children whose parents started after 27 months.

Parents and children each have their own "job" to do when it comes to potty training.

Parents:

- Recognize and let your child know that he or she is in control of his or her body
- Ask your child whether he or she wants to use the potty or a diaper/pull-up each day
- Teach your child words for body parts, urine, and bowel movements
- Offer your child the tools—a small potty, potty seat, stool—necessary to succeed at toileting
- Label your child's toileting habits. If your child is still in diapers, after he or she has



Finding a toilet training method that works for your family is the key. No matter how you do it, remember that potty training takes time, with many accidents along the way.

had a bowel movement, you might say: *You just pooped. Okay, let's change you into a clean diaper so you are more comfortable.*

- Handle potty accidents without anger
- Avoid punishment
- Show your child the logical benefits of using the potty — such as being able to choose his or her own underpants

Your child:


- Decides whether to use the toilet or wear a diaper/pull-up
- Learns his or her body's signals for urine and bowel movements
- Uses the toilet at his or her own speed

Diapers, because they are now so absorbent, can be a disincentive to learning to use the potty as children don't experience any of the natural discomfort of elimination. This cause-effect connection between urinating and feeling wet is important for children who are learning how and when to use the toilet. If the weather cooperates, it can be helpful to let your child run around outside without a diaper or in underpants to experience these sensations.

Finding a toilet training method that works for your family is the key. No matter how you do it, remember that potty training takes time, with many accidents along the way.

Children with special needs may take longer to learn to use the potty. They may also need special equipment and a lot of help and patience from you. For questions about toilet training, talk with your health care provider or service coordinator.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Super-duper Supermarket.** Line up empty cereal boxes, empty juice containers, and other food boxes. Give your child empty grocery bags, a basket, or box to use as her "grocery cart." Let her shop for the food she'd like to buy. Use a cash register (i.e., a shoebox) to pretend to ring up her purchases. This game encourages your child to expand the play scenario by using her imagination and logical thinking skills. For example, perhaps she will tell you that she needs a pocketbook for her money or ask if you have any more boxes of cookies in your store.
- **Bottoms Up!** Stand at the end of a hallway, facing your child. If you call out "bottom," your child sits on his bottom and scoots toward you. If you say "up," your child stands up and runs toward you. If you say "freeze," he has to stand still. As soon as he gets close enough to tag you, he switches places with you. Activities like this build muscle strength and coordination, promote listening and language skills, and teach social skills like taking cooperation and turn-taking. 



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 30

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you review the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional..

Your Child's Development from 30 to 36 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>My body lets me do "big kid" stuff now! I may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedal a tricycle. • Dress myself with your help. • Draw a line. • Turn a knob or unscrew a cap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child scribble with markers and crayons. This builds early writing skills. • Give your child chances to practice new physical skills like pedaling and climbing. • Child-proof again so that your child's new ability to open caps and doorknobs doesn't lead to danger. • Limit TV time and head outside. Take nature hikes, walk to the playground, or throw a ball around.
<p>I use language to express my thoughts and feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 3, I might use as many as 900 words. • I understand sentences with two or more ideas (<i>You can have a cookie when we get home</i>). • I ask questions. • I am learning my first and last name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new, longer, or more difficult words to build your child's vocabulary: <i>Is your snack scrumptious?</i> • Read books, sing songs, and play rhyming games with real and nonsense words that you and your child make up. • Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer: <i>Where do you think the squirrel is taking that nut?</i>
<p>I am using my new thinking skills to solve problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can remember what happened yesterday. I understand the meaning of <i>now</i>, <i>soon</i>, and <i>later</i>. • I'm becoming a <i>logical thinker</i>. That's why I ask <i>Why?</i> all the time! I want to know the reason for things. • When I am pretending that it is bedtime for Teddy, I put a blanket on him and sing him a lullaby. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child about her day before bedtime. This builds memory and language skills. • Be patient with your child's "Why" questions. Ask your child about her ideas. When she asks, <i>Why do dogs bark?</i> Ask her what she thinks before you provide the answer. This builds thinking skills and creativity. • Encourage your child to use logic in everyday situations: <i>It is raining. What do we need in order to stay dry?</i>

Chart continued on next page



Give your child lots of chances to help out.

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>I can do so many things by myself!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I may help get myself dressed, brush my teeth, and wash my hands.• I love to help out around the house. It makes me feel strong and important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage your child to help in caring for himself, if you want him to be independent. Taking care of oneself can build self-esteem.• Give your child lots of chances to help out. Put away clothes together, set the table, pick up leaves in the yard.
<p>My friends are very important to me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I like playing with other children. I may have one or two favorite friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child deal with conflicts around sharing or turn-taking: <i>There is only one shovel and bucket. I will put the timer on and you will each have 5 minutes to play with it. While you wait for your turn, you can play with the cars.</i>
<p>I am starting to notice similarities and differences in people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I might comment on different skin colors or body shapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child understand and appreciate his own culture and background. Talk respectfully about others who are different from you.• Use embarrassing moments as chances to explain, without judgment, that people are different in many ways—size, skin color, style of dress, and so on.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 30

What It's Like for You

We went over to my cousin Anthony's house and he has trains. I was so excited when I saw all of them! I sat down and took two train cars and tried to connect them. It didn't work...I kept trying to stick them together but they wouldn't stay! I looked at Daddy and asked him for help. Daddy said, Turn that train around and then try to hook them. I did what he said and—wow!—I did it! I made a big long train with sooo many cars and pushed them around the track. Then Anthony came over and he wanted to play too. Daddy said, Okay, now let's give Anthony some train cars. I wasn't happy about it, but I pulled a few trains off and gave them to Anthony. Then Anthony said, Wooo! Wooo! Let's have a train parade! I said, Okay, how about our trains go to the park? Anthony and I pushed our trains around and around the track until dinnertime.

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- Persistence, when she sticks to the challenging task of trying to connect the trains
- How to ask for help when needed when she turns to a trusted adult (her Dad) for assistance
- Confidence and self-esteem when she finally succeeds at connecting the trains
- Cooperation, sharing, and friendship-building when she shares the train cars and plays with her cousin Anthony

Language and Thinking Skills:

- How to use language to ask for help and to discuss the plot of the pretend play storyline she is developing with her cousin
- Problem-solving skills when she works to connect the train cars
- Dramatic and pretend play skills when she and her cousin develop a story to act out with their trains

Physical Skills:

- Fine motor skills (using the muscles in her hands and fingers) when she connects the trains and pushes them around the track

Did You Know...

That your child is getting better at arguing with you? From age 1 1/2 to age 3 1/2, your child's ability to question your rules gets better and more sophisticated. A small research study of 70 parent-child pairs found that as their children got older, parents more frequently found themselves bargaining, reprimanding, and providing explanations for the reason "why" behind rules or limits. And as the children grew, they were actually *less* likely to ignore parents and also *less* likely to directly defy parents. However, they were *more* likely to negotiate—which meant that parents found themselves reasoning with their toddlers much more.

Reference: Kuczynski, L., Kochanska, G., Radke-Yarrow, M., & Girnius-Brown, O. (1987, November). A developmental interpretation of children's noncompliance. *Developmental Psychology*, 23(6), 799-806.



When your child is bargaining, he is showing you that he is a good thinker—solving the problem of how to get around your rules.

What the Research Means for You

There may be days when you feel as if you should have gone to law school in order to deal with those master negotiators we call toddlers. Never fear, this is a very normal and actually, a very positive milestone in your child's development. When your child is bargaining, he is showing you that he is a good thinker—solving the problem of how to get around your rules. When he comes up with his own suggestion for what the rule might be and a reason why it's a good idea, he's using his reasoning and creative thinking abilities, and his language skills too.

This doesn't mean that you need to agree or give in. Here are some different ways to handle these "negotiations" while helping your child learn and respect rules and limits:

- **Offer choices to sidestep power struggles.** For example, your toddler wants to use the adult glass cup but you have a rule that he can't—he needs to use a plastic cup. (This is the limit.) However, the *color* of the cup is up to your child (this is the choice). Another example is brushing teeth: *Teeth have to be brushed to keep them healthy.* (The limit.) *Do you want to brush before we read books or after?* (The choice.)
- **Choose your battles.** Does it matter whether your child has a banana or a bagel for snack? Decide what issues are most important to you, and why. Then explain these to your child and follow through consistently.
- **Be consistent.** If your child discovers that if he bargains long enough, you will give in, he has learned that this is an effective way of getting what he wants. If you have decided "the rule is the rule," let him know you understand he is disappointed/angry/frustrated, but that the answer is no. When you are clear and consistent your child will learn that this rule is "for real" and that bargaining doesn't work.
- **Explanations are important.** Explaining your reason is not giving in. It's helping your growing toddler become a logical thinker and learn how the world works. Explanations help children see the connections between events, learn cause and effect, and develop the ability to make logical predictions (*if hitting is wrong, then kicking probably is too*). Explanations build on children's growing thinking skills and give them the information they need to really understand a rule...and follow it.

Spotlight on: Choosing Toys for Toddlers

Toddlers are little explorers who learn by doing. Play gives your child a great opportunity to develop and practice new skills at her own pace by following her unique interests. The toys and playthings your child has available to her can shape her development in important ways.

Below are some ideas for choosing toys that will grow with your child, offer challenges, and nurture skill development in all domains (including thinking, physical, language and social-emotional skills).

- **Choose toys that can be used in a variety of ways.** Toddlers love to take apart, put back together, pull out, put in, add on, and build up. Choose toys that are "open-ended" in the sense that your child can play many different games with them. For example, wooden blocks can be used to make a road, a zoo, a bridge, or a spaceship. Toys like this spark your child's imagination and help him develop thinking skills.

Examples: Blocks, interlocking blocks, nesting blocks or cups, and toys for sand and water play



Choose toys that are “open-ended” in the sense that your child can play many different games with them.

- **Look for toys that will grow with your child.** We all have had the experience of buying a toy that our child plays with for 2 days and never touches again. You can guard against that by looking for toys that can be fun at different developmental stages. For example, small plastic animals are fun for a young toddler who may like to use them for fill-and-dump, while an older toddler can use them to act out a story she makes up.

Examples: Plastic toy animals and action figures, toddler-friendly dollhouses, trains and dump trucks (and other vehicles), stuffed animals, and dolls

- **Select toys that encourage exploration and problem-solving.** Play gives children the chance to practice new skills over and over again. Toys that give kids a chance to figure something out on their own—or with a little coaching—build their logical thinking skills and help them become persistent problem-solvers. They also help children develop spatial relations skills (understanding how things fit together), hand-eye coordination, and fine motor skills (using the small muscles in the hands and fingers).

Examples: Puzzles, shape-sorters, blocks, nesting blocks or cups, art materials like clay, paint, crayons, or playdough

- **Look for toys that spark your child’s imagination.** During your child’s third year, her creativity is really taking off as he is now able to take on the role of someone else (like a king) and imagine that something (like a block) is actually something else (like a piece of cake). Look for toys that your child can use as he develops and acts out stories. Pretend play builds language and literacy skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to sequence (put events in a logical order).

Examples: Dress-up clothing, blocks, toy food and plastic plates, action figures, stuffed animals and dolls, trains and trucks, toddler-friendly dollhouses, toy tools, and “real-life” accessories such as a wrapping paper tube “fire hose” for your little fire fighter. The all-purpose large cardboard box is always a big hit for toddlers and is free. Boxes become houses, pirate ships, barns, tunnels—and more!

- **Give your child the chance to play with “real” stuff—or toys that look like the real thing.** Your toddler is getting good at figuring out how objects in her world work—from television remotes and cellphones to whisks and mops.

Examples: Plastic dishes and food, toy keys, toy phone, dress-up clothes, musical instruments, child-size brooms, mops, brushes, and dustpans

- **Toss in some “getting ready to read” toys.** Books, magnetic alphabet letters, and art supplies like markers, crayons, and fingerpaints help your child develop early writing and reading skills. “Real-life” props like take-out menus, catalogs, or magazines are fun for your child to look at and play with and also build familiarity with letters, text, and print.

- **Seek out toys that encourage your child to be active.** Toddlers are doing all kinds of physical tricks as they are stronger and more confident with their bodies. Look for toys that help your child practice current physical skills and develop new ones.



*Consider starting a
“family game night”
when all of you play
together.*

Examples: Balls of different shapes and sizes, tricycles or three-wheeled scooters (with appropriate protective gear), plastic bowling sets, child-size basketball hoop, pull-toys (e.g., toys that your child can pull on a string), wagon to fill and pull, gardening tools to dig and rake with, moving boxes (open at both ends) to crawl through

- **Look for toys that nurture cross-generational play.** While adults and children can play almost anything together, there are some toys that are designed for adult participation. As your child approaches age 3 and beyond, early board games—that involve using one’s memory or simple board games that do not require reading—are fun for all ages to play. Consider starting a “family game night” when all of you play together. Board games encourage counting, matching and memory skills, as well as listening skills and self-control (as children learn to follow the rules). Another important benefit is teaching children to be gracious winners and how to cope with losing.

Let’s Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Big Words, Little Words.** Help your child get ready to write by giving her the chance to play with markers and crayons. First, give her a few regular sized pieces of paper for writing. Then cut the paper in half to make smaller rectangles and give her these strips to write on. With larger pieces of paper, you will probably see your child making larger shapes—big circles and swirls and scribbles. When the paper is smaller, your child is challenged to control her hand movements in order to stay on the paper. This builds the muscles in her hands and fingers which prepares her for learning to write “for real” later on.
- **Fill ‘Er Up!** Give your child three plastic cups and some items that fit inside and underneath the cups, like small blocks or plastic animals. Fill and “pour” from the cups. Pretend to “drink” from the cups. Then turn each cup upside down and try hiding an object underneath one of the cups. See if your child can guess where it is. Give him a turn to hide the object and have you guess. Games like this build thinking and problem-solving skills and develop coordination and the muscles in the hands and fingers. They also teach turn-taking. 🌻



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 31

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you review the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional..

Your Child's Development from 30 to 36 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>My body lets me do "big kid" stuff now! I may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedal a tricycle. • Dress myself with your help. • Draw a line. • Turn a knob or unscrew a cap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child scribble with markers and crayons. This builds early writing skills. • Give your child chances to practice new physical skills like pedaling and climbing. • Child-proof again so that your child's new ability to open caps and doorknobs doesn't lead to danger. • Limit TV time and head outside. Take nature hikes, walk to the playground, or throw a ball around.
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Chart continued on next page



Help your child manage conflicts around sharing or turn-taking.

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<p>I can do so many things by myself!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I may help get myself dressed, brush my teeth, and wash my hands.• I love to help out around the house. It makes me feel strong and important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage your child to help in caring for himself, if you want him to be independent. Taking care of oneself can build self-esteem.• Give your child lots of chances to help out. Put away clothes together, set the table, pick up leaves in the yard.
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<p>I am starting to notice similarities and differences in people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I might comment on different skin colors or body shapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child understand and appreciate his own culture and background. Talk respectfully about others who are different from you.• Use embarrassing moments as chances to explain, without judgment, that people are different in many ways—size, skin color, style of dress, and so on.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 31

What It's Like for Your Child

Some days it's easy to say good-bye to Daddy at child care. But today, it was hard. I felt tired and cranky. Daddy's arms felt so warm and good. I just didn't want him to go. I was crying and crying and nothing made me feel better. Miss Tanisha said I could paint or she could read me a story. But all I wanted was Daddy. I told him, Don't go! Don't go! I sad today. Daddy stay! He said, Are you having trouble saying good-bye this morning? I can stay a few minutes longer if you need some extra time.

So we cuddled and rocked in the rocking chair. Then, after a while, he said it was time for him to go. I got tears in my eyes again. He smiled at me and touched my hair and said, It's time for Daddy to go and for you to play. I know you're sad. I am sad to leave you too. But you will have a great time here like you always do and Grandma will be here after nap to get you like she always does. Let's do our special kisses now so you can find your seat for circle time.

I knew what that meant. I kiss Daddy's hand and he kisses mine. Then, when we are missing each other during the day, we can take out our kisses and put them on our cheeks. When we were done, Miss Tanisha took my hand and walked me to my place. She gave me a hug and I gave her a big hug back. She asked me if I wanted to be lunch helper—she knows that's my favorite job. I said yes, and sat down, and we all sang, Good morning, good morning, good morning to you!

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- To cope with separations as he says good-bye to his dad
- To communicate his feelings and trust that they will be understood and respected by his father
- To build a warm and trusting relationship with his caregiver, Miss Tanisha
- To use special routines (such as the "kissing hand" routine) to cope with his sad feelings about saying good-bye

Language and Thinking Skills:

- To use language to express his thoughts and feelings
- Creativity and imagination as he imagines the kiss on his hand and receives comfort from it
- To be a logical thinker such as when he understands that Miss Tanisha offered him the lunch helper job because it is his favorite. This shows that he is able to see the world from another person's perspective and think about the "why" behind their actions.

Did You Know...

Children learn compassion, remorse, how to get along with peers, and how to follow rules, when they have the chance to practice what to say and what to do at these moments? Researchers studied a small group of 28 toddlers between 20 and 31 months of age to see how children learned "pro-social" behaviors. Pro-social behaviors were defined as behaviors, like those listed above, that help children become positive, contributing members of their communities. What they found is that children who



When you show respect to others, apologize when appropriate, and show how you are following rules, you have a significant, positive influence on your child.

had the most opportunities to practice pro-social “scripts” and habits—such as being prompted by an adult to comfort another child who was in distress—showed the most pro-social behavior.

Reference: Bergin, C. (1987). Mother-child interaction and prosocial development in toddlers: A multivariate study using the living systems framework. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD, April 23-26.

What the Research Means for You

We often remind children to “use their words.” But it’s easy to forget that toddlers often don’t *have* the words or experience to handle many of the more complex situations they encounter in the toddler years. That’s why teaching children how to respond in different situations—what words or behaviors are appropriate—is so important for their social-emotional development. Here are some ways you can build these important learning opportunities into everyday moments:

- **Give your child the words—or “scripts”—she needs to develop positive social skills.** *Look, your friend fell down and bumped his knee. Let’s go ask if he’s okay and see if he wants some ice. Or, You have a new friend in your preschool class. His name is Nathan. Let’s go say hello, and ask Nathan if he wants to play.*
- **Be a role-model.** Your child watches you carefully. When you show respect to others (including him), apologize when appropriate, and show how you are following rules, you have a significant, positive influence on your child.
- **Prompt your child to use good manners.** Your child may need to be prompted to say *I’m sorry* after she accidentally steps on another child’s toe at the playground. (Or to say *Excuse Me*, after that rather loud burp!) But with patient repetition over time, children find their own ways of expressing these kinds of thoughts and feelings.

Spotlight on: Helping Your Toddler Develop Self-Control

Self-control is the ability to recognize, express, and cope with strong emotions in ways that are appropriate and acceptable. Developing self-control begins at birth and continues throughout childhood. It is a skill that is critical to children’s school success and overall healthy development. It allows children to cooperate with others, to cope with frustration, and to resolve conflicts. Young children learn these skills through interactions with others and guidance from parents and other caregivers.

The process of developing self-control starts very early, for example, when babies stop crying and learn to wait when they hear a parent coming down the hallway to get them after their nap. Children continue working on self-control skills for most of their childhood, and through the teen years—which may come as no surprise to the parents of adolescents!

Toddlers have minds of their own and strong feelings that they express with gusto. *No!* becomes a favorite word and a powerful way to assert their independence. At the same time, toddlers can become easily frustrated because there are still many things that they want to do but can’t. Routines are especially helpful now as they make children feel secure at a time when they can feel very out of control.



Naming and recognizing his feelings helps your child learn to manage his emotions.

Even older toddlers are unable to stop themselves from acting on their desires. The following are strategies that can help them develop self-control:

- **Give your child opportunities to choose.** This lets her know you value how she thinks about the world and that you trust her to make good decisions. It also gives her a sense of control. Let your child make choices about things like what to play, what to read, or what to have for snack (among two or three healthy snacks you offer). Remember, if a decision is really yours, don't offer a choice. Say, *It's bed time*, not *Are you ready for bed?* Or, if you really care that her pants and shirt match, offer two shirt choices that both match.
- **Limit the number of choices.** Too many choices can be overwhelming for a toddler: *Do you want cereal or a bagel for breakfast?*
- **Label and recognize your child's feelings.** Letting children know their feelings are understood helps them calm down and regain control. This doesn't mean you give in to their demands. *I know you are mad that I turned the TV off. It's okay to be mad but you can't hit me. You can tell me with your words how mad you are or stomp your feet to show your anger. When you calm down, we can read this book.* Naming and recognizing his feelings helps your child learn to manage his emotions.
- **Use short sentences when your child is very upset.** When your toddler is having difficulty making a decision or managing her feelings, limit the number of words you use. Too many words can be overwhelming for your toddler and make it harder for her to calm down.
- **Help your child learn to wait.** Waiting helps children learn self-control. It also teaches them that others have needs, too. Make the wait-time short and give your child something to do in the meantime. Also, playing with friends offers many opportunities to help your child learn to wait, share, and take-turns.
- **Play turn-taking and listening games.** Any game that involves taking turns, whether it is rolling a ball back and forth, racing toy trucks, or feeding a babydoll, helps children develop self-control as they learn to wait for their turn to participate. Listening games, like simple versions of *Simon Says* or *Red Light, Green Light*, also help your child listen and follow rules—part of mastering self-control.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **It's a bird, it's a plane, it's....Super Kid!!!!** Clip or pin a dish towel to your child's back to make her very own superhero cape. Go on adventures inside or out as the two of you rescue stuffed animals from sofa-top "trees" or pull dump trucks from couch cushion "quicksand." What stories does *your* child come up with as you play? Games like this build logical thinking, language, literacy, and sequencing skills as your child acts out her story. She is also building muscle strength and coordination and as the two of you jump, run, and fly through your very own Gotham.
- **We took a magic walk and we saw...** With your child, find photos of animals, gardens, houses, and other interesting pictures in magazines. Cut them out and glue to index cards. When you want to go on a "magical" walk, hold up your stack of cards and say, "We took a magic walk and we saw..." and choose a card. See if your child knows the name of that picture. The two of you can move and make sounds like the animal you chose, or pretend to knock on the door of a house, or smell a flower photo. Games like this invite your child to use his growing language skills, as well as his imagination and logical thinking. For example, your child might tell you he wants a banana after he sees a picture of a monkey. 🍌



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 32

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you review the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional..

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Chart continued on next page



*Give your child lots of chances to help out.
Put away clothes together, set the table,
pick up leaves in the yard.*

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<p>I can do so many things by myself!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I may help get myself dressed, brush my teeth, and wash my hands. • I love to help out around the house. It makes me feel strong and important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to help in caring for himself, if you want him to be independent. Taking care of oneself can build self-esteem. • Give your child lots of chances to help out. Put away clothes together, set the table, pick up leaves in the yard.
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<p>I am starting to notice similarities and differences in people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I might comment on different skin colors or body shapes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help your child understand and appreciate his own culture and background. Talk respectfully about others who are different from you. • Use embarrassing moments as chances to explain, without judgment, that people are different in many ways—size, skin color, style of dress, and so on.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 32

What It's Like for Your Child

Sandra and I were playing on the tricycles. We were riding next to each other and then following each other. It was fun! Then I got up for one minute to pick up some mulch and scoop it into a bucket to make soup. When I turned around to get on my red tricycle, Sandra was riding it. I didn't want the blue one, I wanted mine, the red one. Miss Kathy said that she understood I was upset but that the tricycles belong to the school and we had to share and take turns riding them.

But I was so mad! I was riding it first and so it was mine! I ran after Sandra and tried to pull her off. Miss Kathy said that wasn't okay, and that I needed to sit with her until I could calm down. She put her arm around me but I was still really mad. She got me my favorite stuffed animal and I cuddled it for a while. I felt better and stopped crying. Then Sandra got up! I ran over and grabbed that red tricycle. I was so happy! I shouted, "Yay! My bike!"

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- To build friendships as these two toddlers enjoy playing together
- To share, a skill that takes a lot of time and practice to master
- To accept limits, when the teacher stops her from pushing and helps her learn that it is not acceptable
- To express and cope with strong emotions
- To soothe herself, when she cuddles the stuffed animal

Language and Thinking Skills:

- The concept of ownership: For toddlers, "first holder is the owner" is an idea that persists through childhood ("It's mine!" "No, I had it first!"). Grasping the notion that there are "rules" (however unspoken) about ownership shows complex thinking ability.
- To use language to express emotions and ideas
- To play pretend as she prepares the mulch "soup"

Physical Skills:

- To coordinate her legs and arms to hold the handles and pedal the tricycle
- Fine motor skills (using the muscles in her hands and fingers) to scoop and stir the mulch soup

Did You Know...

Your toddler now knows whether he or she is a boy or a girl? He is also likely to prefer toys considered "typical" for his gender and to seek out playmates of the same sex. As children near age 3, they have developed an awareness of how boys and girls, men and women, look different. And they know whether they are a boy or a girl. Children are also noticing what the typical toys and clothing are for their gender (thus, the requests for princess pajamas or toy bulldozers). Your child may also share her view of gender-appropriate rules and activities—for example, she may explain to you that mommies can *never* drive garbage trucks, only daddies.

Reference: Poulin-Dubois, D., Serbin, L. A., & Derbyshire, A. (1998). Toddlers' intermodal and verbal knowledge about gender. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 44, 338-354.



By offering a balanced selection of toys and books and giving children opportunities to play with both boys and girls, they gain a greater understanding of themselves.

What the Research Means for You

Many parents hope that their children will not be bound by common gender stereotypes, and often make choices that support this goal—for example, providing children with toys associated with both genders, reading stories with characters who defy gender stereotypes, etc. It's important to remember, however, that understanding what gender they are is a very important milestone for children and important part of forming their identity.

This self-knowledge comes at a time when children are also becoming increasingly skilled at *categorizing*, or understanding what goes with what. For example, you may see your child put all her plastic animals in one pile and all her trains in another. For young children, understanding what gender they are is a kind of sorting process. They start off with very strict “rules” about what is “boy-like” and what is “girl-like.” Over time and with experience, children develop a more flexible view of gender roles.

Think of this as a learning process where your child is “trying on” what it means to be a boy or a girl. Allow your child to explore “boyiness” and “girliness” in his or her own way—be it with tea parties or bath-towel superhero capes. If your child is interested in doing things typically associated with the opposite gender, for example, a boy who wants his toe nails painted, and you feel comfortable letting him do it, you are giving him the message that exploration is okay and accept him no matter what.

By offering a balanced selection of toys and books and giving children opportunities to play with both boys and girls, they gain a greater understanding of themselves. Most importantly, avoid turning the issue of gender identity into a power struggle because it can complicate the important process your child is going through in forming his or her own identity. Children need the chance to figure out who they are as individuals. The more comfortable with and accepted they feel by you in this process, the stronger their identity and self-esteem will be.

Spotlight on: The Power of Pretend Play

Have you come home one day to find that your child has turned into a kitten, crawling on the floor on all fours, meowing, and asking for a bowl of milk? The ability to pretend marks a big leap in the development of thinking skills. When children pretend, it means that they understand symbols—that a block can become a car, a shoebox can become a home for stuffed animals, and that a word stands for an object or an idea. Understanding symbols is important for the development of skills such as math, logic, writing, and science.

Language and literacy skills are also developing as children make up stories and tell them (or act them out) to one another. They are sequencing events—what logically comes first, second, third—a skill that children will use later for reading comprehension, math, and science. You will also see your child's logical thinking skills at work in her pretend play. When you suggest that she put her stuffed giraffe, who feels sick, to bed, she may agree and add that her giraffe might need some yucky medicine, too.

Toddlers build important social-emotional skills through pretend play as they act out stories in order to work out difficult situations or ideas they are struggling with. For example, after a new sibling is born, you may see a toddler play a game in which he repeatedly tells the baby to “go away.” Or a child may play “child care” by asking his parent to be the baby while he is the daddy who says *bye-bye, I'm going to work now*.

Toddlers are also practicing empathy through pretend play, as they take on the perspective of a character in their story, including that person or animal's emotions.



Pretend play can be a very healthy way to cope with difficult feelings and can also reduce the need to act on these feelings in “real life” as children use play to work through their difficult emotions.

For example, you may see your child pretend to be a puppy. You might ask: *How are you doing, puppy?* Your child responds, *I’m sad. . . I lost my bone!* Your toddler is now able to understand the world from a dog’s perspective and imagines what would make a dog feel sad. Interactions like these show that your child has a greater ability to understand the feelings and motivations of others (including those who walk on two legs, not four.)

Here are some ideas for enriching your child’s pretend play:

- **Let your child be the “director.”** When you follow your child’s lead, you help him develop his own ideas. This approach also strengthens his thinking skills as he makes logical connections in his stories: *The dog has to go back in his house because it’s raining.* You can help him develop his ideas by asking questions like, *What is going to happen next?*
- **Offer some “props” to help your child act out the stories she’s creating**—hats, dress-up clothing, take-out menus, pads and markers, toy dishes, child-sized brooms, blocks, play food and household objects like big cardboard boxes, blankets, pillows, etc.
- **Build on your child’s play.** If you see your toddler stirring a pot with a spoon, ask him what he’s making for dinner and if you can have some. If your child is pushing a dump truck, ask her where her truck is going or show her how to build a tunnel by leaning two pillows together. Interactions like these expand your child’s pretend play and thinking skills.
- **Notice themes in your child’s play.** One parent was distressed when her almost-three-year-old played a game with her dollhouse where the “big sister” doll repeatedly hit the “baby” doll. (Not surprisingly, this game emerged after the birth of a new brother.) When toddlers are playing a game that we find upsetting, the temptation is to shift them to a new activity. However, pretend play can be a very healthy way to cope with difficult feelings and can also reduce the need to act on these feelings in “real life” as children use play to work through their difficult emotions. After watching her child at play, the parent above joined her and validated the “big sister” doll’s feelings about how hard it can be to have a new baby doll in the house. Within a few days she saw her daughter’s “hitting game” end. However, if your child repeatedly plays out a theme that is upsetting or worrying to you, and seems upset during the play, talk it through with your health care provider or a child development specialist.

Let’s Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Visit Colortown.** Cover four or five shoeboxes with different colored construction paper. Cut a small doorway in each one, just the right size to roll a toy car through. Get a few toy cars and trucks and play Colortown with your child. Ask which cars will park inside which garages: *Can you park the red car in the blue garage?* Or, *Let’s park the school bus near the yellow house.* Or, *Can you put the dump truck between the green and orange houses?* Games like this help your child learn new words, understand concepts like *near*, *between* and *inside*, and learn colors. Pretend play games can also spark your child’s imagination as the two of you make up stories about your adventures in Colortown.
- **Find the Pair.** Gather together five sets of items that go together—for example, two shoes, a metal pot and wooden spoon, umbrella and rain coat, dust broom and dust pan, cereal and plastic bowl, etc. Mix these items up and place them in a row. Play Find the Pair with your child as you take turns selecting one item from the group and then choosing what it goes with. Games like this build your child’s logical thinking skills. 🌟



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 33

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you review the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional..

Your Child's Development from 30 to 36 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>My body lets me do "big kid" stuff now! I may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedal a tricycle. • Dress myself with your help. • Draw a line. • Turn a knob or unscrew a cap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child scribble with markers and crayons. This builds early writing skills. • Give your child chances to practice new physical skills like pedaling and climbing. • Child-proof again so that your child's new ability to open caps and doorknobs doesn't lead to danger. • Limit TV time and head outside. Take nature hikes, walk to the playground, or throw a ball around.
<p>I use language to express my thoughts and feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 3, I might use as many as 900 words. • I understand sentences with two or more ideas (<i>You can have a cookie when we get home</i>). • I ask questions. • I am learning my first and last name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new, longer, or more difficult words to build your child's vocabulary: <i>Is your snack scrumptious?</i> • Read books, sing songs, and play rhyming games with real and nonsense words that you and your child make up. • Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer: <i>Where do you think the squirrel is taking that nut?</i>
<p>I am using my new thinking skills to solve problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can remember what happened yesterday. I understand the meaning of <i>now</i>, <i>soon</i>, and <i>later</i>. • I'm becoming a <i>logical thinker</i>. That's why I ask <i>Why?</i> all the time! I want to know the reason for things. • When I am pretending that it is bedtime for Teddy, I put a blanket on him and sing him a lullaby. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child about her day before bedtime. This builds memory and language skills. • Be patient with your child's "Why" questions. Ask your child about her ideas. When she asks, <i>Why do dogs bark?</i> Ask her what she thinks before you provide the answer. This builds thinking skills and creativity. • Encourage your child to use logic in everyday situations: <i>It is raining. What do we need in order to stay dry?</i>

Chart continued on next page



Ask your toddler questions that require more than a yes or no answer—this builds his communication skills.

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>I can do so many things by myself!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I may help get myself dressed, brush my teeth, and wash my hands.• I love to help out around the house. It makes me feel strong and important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage your child to help in caring for himself, if you want him to be independent. Taking care of oneself can build self-esteem.• Give your child lots of chances to help out. Put away clothes together, set the table, pick up leaves in the yard.
<p>My friends are very important to me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I like playing with other children. I may have one or two favorite friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child deal with conflicts around sharing or turn-taking: <i>There is only one shovel and bucket. I will put the timer on and you will each have 5 minutes to play with it. While you wait for your turn, you can play with the cars.</i>
<p>I am starting to notice similarities and differences in people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I might comment on different skin colors or body shapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child understand and appreciate his own culture and background. Talk respectfully about others who are different from you.• Use embarrassing moments as chances to explain, without judgment, that people are different in many ways—size, skin color, style of dress, and so on.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 33

What It's Like for Your Child

I was driving my garbage truck (the plastic laundry basket dad gave me to push along the carpet). Every time I stopped, I pretended I was at a different house and I picked all different kinds of garbage (piles of my toys) and tossed them in my truck. I said, Garbage truck here! Get your garbage! When I backed up, I never forgot to say, beep beep beep beep. Then my garbage truck filled up. The toys started to fall out when I put them on the top. I got really frustrated. But then Dad asked me where the garbage trucks bring the garbage when their trucks fill up. I said: I know—the dump! So I drove the truck to the dump (my bedroom) and dumped it all out! Then I drove back carefully through the town, honking and making the sound of the truck crushing the garbage: Grrrrrrrunch.

All this work was really tiring. Daddy must have seen I was losing steam and asked how I was doing. I told him: I doing garbage. I be the garbage man. Dad said: Isn't work done yet? How about we sit outside and have a popsicle? Sounds good to me! I carefully parked my garbage truck at the garage (the coffee table with a blanket over the top) and headed out the kitchen door. I love hanging out with Daddy.

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- To see the world from another person's perspective as he role-plays what a garbage collector does
- Independence, when he is happy to play on his own for a while
- Relationship-building skills as he connects with his father
- Empathy, when his dad sees that he must be tired from all his hard "work"
- To manage frustration when he calms himself down—with Dad's help—as the toys start falling out the top of the laundry basket

Language and Thinking Skills:

- To use language to tell his story about the garbage truck, to play out the role of the garbage collector, and to bring the garbage truck to life by beeping and honking
- Problem-solving and logical thinking skills when, with Dad's guidance, he figures out what to do when the laundry basket won't fit any more toys
- Symbolic thinking skills—the ability to make one object stand in for another—when he uses the laundry basket as a truck and creates a "garage" out of the coffee table and a blanket

Did You Know...

Between 22 and 33 months of age, self-control increases considerably? However, your child's mastery of self-control may be influenced by gender. This research found that 33-month-old girls showed greater self-control than did boys of the same age. And another study found that children's temperaments have some influence on the development of self-control. Children who were more *emotionally reactive* (responding with more intense behavior and feelings), and those who *tended to jump right in to new situations*, also tended to show lower levels of self-control. More emotionally even-keeled children (kids who don't show extreme fluctuations in emotional expression) and



Consistency with rules is key to helping children learn to make good choices.

children who had more difficulty with change (in routines, caregivers, etc.) tended to show higher levels of self-control.

References: Kochanska, G., Murray, K. T., & Harlan, E. T. (2000, Mar). Effortful control in early childhood: Continuity and change, antecedents, and implications for social development. *Developmental Psychology*, 36(2), 220-232.

Kochanska, G., & Knaack, A. (2003, Dec). Effortful control as a personality characteristic of young children: Antecedents, correlates, and consequences. *Journal of Personality*, 71(6), 1087-1112.

What the Research Means for You

Children, based on both gender and temperament, will have varying abilities to show self-control as they near age 3. But there is a lot that parents can do—with patience and guidance—to help children develop this important skill:

- **Recognize your child's feeling or goal.** Use words to show your child that you understand his goal: *You want to dig in the dirt, but you cannot dig up the houseplants. Let's go outside and you can dig in the sandbox.*
- **Redirect your child.** Help your toddler express her interests or meet her goals in an acceptable way. *I know you love pretending to talk on my cell phone. Let me get my old one—then you can pretend to call me and we can talk!*
- **Teach alternatives.** Show your child acceptable ways to channel his energy. Without an acceptable alternative, the behavior is likely to continue as most toddlers are not yet able to identify other (more acceptable) behaviors on their own. So for a little one who loves to stand on his chair at the dinner table, give him lots of opportunities for (supervised) climbing and jumping at the playground.
- **Be consistent.** Consistency with rules is key to helping children learn to make good choices. If every time a child throws a toy it gets taken away, she quickly learns not to throw toys. But when the rules keep changing, it is hard for young children to learn how to make good choices.

Spotlight on: Your Toddler's Growing Thinking Skills

During this third year, you will see a big jump in your child's thinking skills. She will start to use humor and make jokes. She will be especially amused when things are not as they should be, for example, putting underwear on her head or socks on her hands. Her growing thinking skills mean that she will also be able to come up with solutions to more complex challenges. And she is starting to develop empathy—understanding how another person is feeling. She knows others have thoughts and feelings that are different from hers and she can imagine what these thoughts and feelings might be. She may give you a hug when you are sad. You may see her help another child who is struggling. All of these changes and milestones are proof that your little one is learning lots through her everyday interactions with you.

Below are two key skills that emerge in the third year and suggestions for what you can do to nurture your child's development.

Your toddler is beginning to notice patterns and connect ideas.

Toddlers can use their memories to apply past experiences to the present. They see a cloudy sky and know that this might mean rain is coming. This also helps them understand how the world works—that rain comes from the gray clouds. You see this new ability to detect patterns and connect ideas when your child:

- Laughs at funny things



Do laundry together. Your child can separate shirts in one pile and socks in another. He can help set the table and organize the forks, plates, and spoons.

- Asks grandma for a cookie after mom says no
- Tells you it is raining and that he will need an umbrella

What you can do:

- **Make connections between past and present.** Make the logical connections in your child's life clear to him: He has to wear mittens because his hands get cold if he doesn't. He needs to bring a towel to the pool so he can dry himself off.
- **Use everyday routines to notice patterns.** Using language to explain these patterns helps your child become a logical thinker and increases her vocabulary. *Do you notice that every time the dog whines he has to go out to do his business? When the buzzer goes off, the clothes are dry.*

Your toddler is interested in sorting and categorizing objects based on how they look, feel, or what they do.

Older toddlers can sort objects by their characteristics (all the toy fish in one pile, all the toy dinosaurs in another). They are also beginning to understand more complex concepts of time, space, size, and quantity. You will see evidence of these new thinking skills when children:

- Organize objects in a logical way (plate next to cup; car next to dollhouse)
- Ask questions like, *How many?* Or, *When?*
- Sort beads by color or size
- Act out stories in their play, especially everyday moments they experience at home (like giving a doll a pretend bath)

What you can do:

- **Sort and categorize through the day.** Do laundry together. Your child can separate shirts in one pile and socks in another. He can help set the table and organize the forks, plates, and spoons. At clean-up time, ask him to put the cars in one place and books in another.
- **Help your child grasp a sense of time.** Use an egg timer to help her put together the concept of time with the experience of time (to help her know what 5 or 10 minutes feels like). This also gives her some sense of control over knowing when a change will happen. She can look at the egg timer and see the arrow moving closer to the "0," which is when she has to stop playing and get in the car.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Pompom Popcorn.** Purchase a variety of pompoms in different sizes and colors from a craft store. Place the pompoms on a dish towel and let your child hold one end, while you hold the other. Sing (to the tune of *Row Row Row Your Boat*): *Pop, pop, pop the corn, shake it up and down. Popping, popping, popping, popping, soon they'll all fall down!* When the pompoms have all dropped to the floor, pick them up together and sort them by size or color. Games like this help your child develop language skills, and the math skill of categorization.
- **Veggie Painting.** Offer your child a potato half, a carrot, a celery stick, a lettuce leaf and let him dip each item in paint and "stamp" it on a piece of paper. If you'd prefer that your child not play with food, offer him a selection of other interesting "objects" to paint with—a spoon, a leaf, a small square of sponge. Activities like this build your child's creative thinking and early writing skills. 🌻



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 34

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

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Your Child's Development from 30 to 36 Months

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<p>My body lets me do "big kid" stuff now! I may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedal a tricycle. • Dress myself with your help. • Draw a line. • Turn a knob or unscrew a cap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child scribble with markers and crayons. This builds early writing skills. • Give your child chances to practice new physical skills like pedaling and climbing. • Child-proof again so that your child's new ability to open caps and doorknobs doesn't lead to danger. • Limit TV time and head outside. Take nature hikes, walk to the playground, or throw a ball around.
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Chart continued on next page



*Help your child understand
and appreciate his own culture
and background.*

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from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 34

What It's Like for Your Child

Mommy took me to the dentist for the first time today. I didn't like it one bit! First, I had to be quiet in the waiting room. I wanted to crawl under the table, but Mommy said, No! Then we went in to get my teeth cleaned. I had to sit in a big chair and it felt cold and slippery. Then the chair moved! It was a little scary. Then—the worst part! I had to lie back, and they put a scratchy bib on me. And they shined a big light on my face and the tooth cleaner leaned over me with something that looked like a silver fork. I pushed her hand away and started to cry and ripped off the bib and tried to get off the chair. I said, Mommy, I'm scared! I don't like it!

Mommy picked me up and cuddled me and helped me feel better. The hygienist showed me the tool she was holding—it wasn't a fork after all, but a little mirror. She let me hold it and check her teeth! Together we counted how many teeth I saw in her mouth. She said that I should have 20 teeth. She asked me, Do you think 20 teeth is a lot or a little? I said, A lot. It's because I'm big now! Then she asked me if she could look in my mouth. I said, Yes, and it wasn't bad at all. When we were done, I got to choose a new toothbrush from her drawer. Of course, I picked green—my favorite color.

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- To rely on her father for comfort, safety, and reassurance when she is scared
- To recognize and name feelings, such as when she says, *I'm scared*
- To accept comfort and regain her composure by cuddling with her father
- To cope with and overcome fears, for example, by exploring the mirror to see that it's nothing to be afraid of

Language and Thinking Skills:

- To use language to express feelings and needs
- To be curious—a key to learning—as she explores the hygienist's mirror
- To use role-playing as a way to cope when she pretends to examine the hygienist's teeth
- Early math skills when she counts how many teeth she sees in the hygienist's mouth
- Logical thinking skills when she connects the idea that 20 teeth is a lot, and she has a lot of teeth because she is a big girl

Did You Know...

That over the next few months your child is starting to grasp the very advanced concept of symbols? In one research study, children aged 2 1/2 to 3 years old were shown a room and then taken to the lab and shown a scale model of the same room. Children then watched a researcher hide a miniature toy in the model room. They were then asked to go into the actual room and find the actual-sized toy in the same place as they saw the researcher hide it in the model.

Children aged 34 months and younger did not successfully complete this task, even with instructions and demonstrations. They just didn't grasp that the model was a symbol of the real room, or that the location of the miniature toy corresponded to an actual toy in the real room. However, children just a few months older, at 36 months,



Parents are responsible for providing healthy foods at meal- and snack-times. Children are responsible for what and how much they eat.

were successful at this game—showing they understood the relationship between a model and what it represents (the room). This is an example of early symbolic thinking skills.

Reference: DeLoache, J. S. (1989 April). Young children's understanding of the correspondence between a scale model and a larger space. *Cognitive Development*, 4(2), 121-139.

What the Research Means for You

What the Research Means for You

Your child is beginning to understand symbols—that one thing (like a block) can stand for another thing (a phone). This is an important skill for learning because it allows children to think about ideas and concepts, and to use their imaginations and be creative. It also leads to your toddler developing an understanding of how to use symbols. For example, when your child enters elementary school, she will be learning about symbols used in math such as the “+” sign. In reading, she will learn that the letters *a-p-p-l-e* make a word—a symbol for an actual piece of fruit.

To help your child develop symbolic thinking skills:

- **Encourage pretend play.** Imaginative play gives children many ways to use symbolic thinking skills—like using a cardboard box to be a racecar. Toys like building blocks and plastic interlocking blocks (which encourage children to construct and create) also develop symbolic thinking skills.
- **Point to words as you read them.** Point and read signs on the street. Show your child the menu before you order for her. Read books and run your fingers under the words as you speak them. Over time, your child will connect these letter symbols with words and ideas.
- **Build on your child's growing skills.** At first your child may play “birthday party” with a plastic toy cake. As he grows, he will be able to create a cake out of a shoebox. It will not look anything like a “real” cake, but he will be able to imagine this box as a symbol for the real thing. You can help him by watching and participating in his play, and offering him the chance to use “props” in new ways.

Spotlight on: Parenting a “Picky” Eater

Do you know a “picky eater”? “Picky” eating is when a child (or adult) refuses foods often or eats the same foods over and over. Picky eating usually peaks in the toddler and preschool years. Many parents worry that their picky eater is not getting enough nutrition to grow. But in most cases, he is. If you keep a food diary for a day by writing down everything your child eats., you'll probably find that he is eating more than you thought.

Ellyn Satter, MS RD LCSW BCD, a researcher and practitioner in the field of pediatric feeding practices, explains that both parents and children have their own “jobs” to do when it comes to eating. Parents are responsible for providing healthy foods at meal- and snack-times. Children are responsible for what and how much they eat. This helps children learn what it feels like to be hungry and then full—and how to make healthy choices based on this awareness, for example eating when hungry and stopping when full.



Having a hand in making the meal increases the chances that your child will taste her “creation.”

The Role of Parents

Research has found that parents’ food preferences are linked to their children’s food preferences (Borah-Giddens & Falciglia, 1993). This is probably not a big surprise since we are more likely to prepare the foods that we enjoy, so our children are more familiar with that group of foods than others. Familiarity with foods is key, **as a child may need to be exposed to new foods more than 10 times before he tries it.**

What can you do to help your child enjoy a range of foods?

- **Eat a range of healthy foods yourself.** Make sure that your own choices are in line with the foods you want your child to eat and enjoy.
- **Prepare meals together.** Having a hand in making the meal increases the chances that your child will taste her “creation.” Have your little one assist with measuring, pouring, or stirring.
- **Avoid showing disgust or disinterest when trying new foods.** A study found that mothers who showed (with their facial expressions, body language or words) that they didn’t want to try a new food had children who also tended to refuse new foods (Carruth & Skinner, 2000). In short, your young child will probably be less willing to try something new if you haven’t tasted it. And if you are a “picky eater” yourself, then your child is likely to imitate you in this behavior, just as she imitates the way you talk on the phone or the way you wave good-bye to her each morning at child care.

What to Avoid

There are two big pitfalls to avoid when trying to nurture healthy eating habits in your child:

- **Forcing your child to eat.** The fact is that forcing children to eat usually leads to the child eating less. Forcing also teaches children to rely on others to tell them how much to eat and what they are feeling. This does not lead to healthy eating habits or good self-esteem. In fact, some research has shown that forcing children to eat can actually make picky eating behavior worse (Sanders, Patel, Le Grice, & Shepherd, 1993).
- **Nagging or making deals with your child.** “Just two more bites, just two more bites!” “If you eat your vegetables, you will get dessert.” Strategies like these tend not to work in the long run. Children who learn to make deals about eating quickly learn to make deals and ask for rewards for doing other things—like brushing teeth or getting their shoes on. And soon they won’t do anything unless there is a reward for it!

If you are worried or have questions about your child’s growth or nutrition, it is a good idea to talk to your child’s health care provider. Keep in mind, however, that as long as your child is not losing weight and has the energy to play and interact, it is likely that he is eating enough to support his growth. 🌻



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 35

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you review the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional..

Your Child's Development from 30 to 36 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>My body lets me do "big kid" stuff now! I may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedal a tricycle. • Dress myself with your help. • Draw a line. • Turn a knob or unscrew a cap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child scribble with markers and crayons. This builds early writing skills. • Give your child chances to practice new physical skills like pedaling and climbing. • Child-proof again so that your child's new ability to open caps and doorknobs doesn't lead to danger. • Limit TV time and head outside. Take nature hikes, walk to the playground, or throw a ball around.
<p>I use language to express my thoughts and feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 3, I might use as many as 900 words. • I understand sentences with two or more ideas (<i>You can have a cookie when we get home</i>). • I ask questions. • I am learning my first and last name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new, longer, or more difficult words to build your child's vocabulary: <i>Is your snack scrumptious?</i> • Read books, sing songs, and play rhyming games with real and nonsense words that you and your child make up. • Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer: <i>Where do you think the squirrel is taking that nut?</i>
<p>I am using my new thinking skills to solve problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can remember what happened yesterday. I understand the meaning of <i>now</i>, <i>soon</i>, and <i>later</i>. • I'm becoming a <i>logical thinker</i>. That's why I ask <i>Why?</i> all the time! I want to know the reason for things. • When I am pretending that it is bedtime for Teddy, I put a blanket on him and sing him a lullaby. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child about her day before bedtime. This builds memory and language skills. • Be patient with your child's "Why" questions. Ask your child about her ideas. When she asks, <i>Why do dogs bark?</i> Ask her what she thinks before you provide the answer. This builds thinking skills and creativity. • Encourage your child to use logic in everyday situations: <i>It is raining. What do we need in order to stay dry?</i>

Chart continued on next page



*Be patient with your child's "Why" questions.
Ask your child about her ideas.*

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>I can do so many things by myself!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I may help get myself dressed, brush my teeth, and wash my hands.• I love to help out around the house. It makes me feel strong and important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage your child to help in caring for himself, if you want him to be independent. Taking care of oneself can build self-esteem.• Give your child lots of chances to help out. Put away clothes together, set the table, pick up leaves in the yard.
<p>My friends are very important to me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I like playing with other children. I may have one or two favorite friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child deal with conflicts around sharing or turn-taking: <i>There is only one shovel and bucket. I will put the timer on and you will each have 5 minutes to play with it. While you wait for your turn, you can play with the cars.</i>
<p>I am starting to notice similarities and differences in people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I might comment on different skin colors or body shapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help your child understand and appreciate his own culture and background. Talk respectfully about others who are different from you.• Use embarrassing moments as chances to explain, without judgment, that people are different in many ways — size, skin color, style of dress, and so on.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 35

What It's Like for Your Child

Granny and I were making pancakes for breakfast. I put on my apron and said, Look at me! I'm a real cooker! Granny laughed. She said, We call a person who cooks, a chef. Okay, I said, I'm a chef! Granny let me dump the flour in and break the egg. Ew! I got slime all over my hands! I started to cry and Granny helped me up to the sink so I could wash my hands with soap. She said, Look what a great job you're doing getting your hands clean again! That made me feel proud.

Granny gave me a spoon and told me to stir as fast as I could! So I did, and I got a big lump of batter on the counter. Oops, I said. Granny just laughed and kissed me on the head. I love her. She never gets upset about spills. Then I stood on the stool while she cooked at the stove. She showed me what her spatula was and which one was the frying pan. When we were done, she let me pour my own syrup. Granny said, Now we have to be careful. These pancakes just came out of the pan. I said, Yeah, they're hot, right? When we called Papa in for breakfast, he said they were the best pancakes he ever had. Granny and I are good chefs.

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- To build strong, positive relationships as she enjoys the time she spends cooking with her Granny
- To cooperate as she and her grandmother work together to make pancakes
- To be patient as she waits for the pancakes to be finished cooking
- Self-help skills when she washes her hands at the sink

Language and Thinking Skills:

- Role playing when she puts on the apron and pretends to be a chef
- New words such as *chef*, *spatula*, and *frying pan*
- Logical thinking skills—that a pancake just out of the frying pan would be too hot to eat right away

Physical Skills:

- Fine motor skills as she uses her hands and fingers to dump, pour, stir and crack the egg, and when she washes her hands.
- Sensory awareness when she notes and dislikes the feel of egg on her hands

Did You Know...

A large, 2-year study of 496 toddlers found that, on average, girls are potty trained by 35 months and boys by 39 months? The study found that the learning process for successful potty training lasted, on average, 8 to 10 months. Researchers also found that attending child care or having a working parent did not affect the timing of toilet learning. However, there were two sub-groups that did see toileting skills emerge earlier than average: Single-headed households and non-Caucasian families were more likely to have children successfully master potty training at earlier ages.

Reference: Schum, T. R., McAuliffe, T. L., Simms, M. D., Walter, J. A., Lewis M., & Pupp, R. (2001). Factors associated with toilet training in the 1990s. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*, 2, 79-86.



Consider giving your child a baby doll as a “gift” from his sibling.

What the Research Means for You

What the Research Means for You

If your child is potty trained already, congratulations on retiring the diapers. But if your toddler is still working on these skills, never fear. The key is to avoid turning potty training into a power struggle. By “forcing” children to use the toilet, parents run the risk that children will rebel, which can actually lengthen the process. In some cases, it can also lead to problems like withholding urine or bowel movements, which can have health implications for children. If your child is still working on potty training, consider letting him decide each day whether to wear a diaper, a pull-up or underpants. Giving your child some measure of control helps him feel like he is part of the decision to use the toilet.

And, although it seems like the opposite of what you *should* do, it’s best not to make a big deal when your child does begin using the toilet. Some children feel a lot of pressure when their parents are vocally celebrating their potty successes. They can become very worried about “failing.” Instead, let your child know that he should be proud of himself, and then go on with your day. If your child continues to show no interest in toileting or is not potty trained by age 4, speak with your health care provider about possible causes and strategies.

Spotlight on: Preparing Your Toddler for a Sibling

While a sibling is a gift to your older child, most toddlers don’t quite see it that way just yet. Sharing your attention, your lap, and your love may not seem like much of a gift. A new sibling—and sharing you—can actually feel like a real loss for her. And while you know that siblings can be a source of friendship and support to one another for the rest of their lives, it may take your older child a little while to appreciate this!

Here are some ideas for preparing your toddler for the arrival of a sister or brother:

- **Share books about new babies, families, and sisters and brothers.** Reading together gives your child the chance to think through this change, ask questions, and to see how other children have coped with a new sibling.
- **Look through** photos of your child’s first months. Talk to her about what happens when a new baby comes home.
- **Play “baby.”** Use pretend play to act out baby care with dolls and to mimic the daily rituals your child will soon see you do with your newborn, like diaper changing, breastfeeding, and bathing. Your toddler can also pretend to be the baby—sometimes the nurturing attention you pay your child during this game is very reassuring.
- **Include your child as much as possible in the birth.** Have her come to the hospital or birthing center afterward, to see that you are okay and to feel a part of the excitement surrounding the baby.
- **Consider giving your child a baby doll as a “gift” from his sibling.** When you are back home, you can suggest that he care for the doll as you care for the new baby and point out what a good job he is doing.

While for many families the transition from one to multiple children is incredibly exciting and joyful, it is also very common to have some “sibling rivalry” bumps along the way. Here are ways to help your older child cope:

- **Allow your toddler to act out angry feelings through play.** Pretend play can be a great way for your child to express the mixed feelings she will likely be experiencing. Acting out aggressively with dolls or stuffed animals is a safe and healthy outlet for her. The more she can get her feelings out in non-destructive ways, the quicker she is likely to move through this phase.



Include your toddler in your baby's daily routines.

- **Validate your toddler's feelings.** Let him know you understand how hard it can be to have a new baby at home and that it's okay to feel angry (and/or the other feelings you think he might be experiencing.) This will let him know he is being "heard" and can help him cope with this big adjustment. It can also reduce feelings of anger toward the baby.
- **Show your child how important being an older sibling is.** You can strengthen the bond between your children by showing your older child how special she is to the new baby. *Sarah gives you the biggest smiles! You really know how to make her happy. Or, What a pretty dress you picked out for Sarah. It's just the right thing to wear today.* The more important and valuable your older child feels, the less she may see the baby as a rival.
- **Include your toddler in the baby's daily routines.** For example, when you are feeding your newborn, have your child sit next to you and tell him a story or sing a song together. Offer ways he can help with baby care (getting the diaper, choosing the baby's clothes).
- **Find ways to make your firstborn feel special.** Make time to spend alone with your toddler. Even a trip to the supermarket can be a treat if your child has you to herself. Whatever you do together, the key is to make it a fun and loving time for the two of you to connect.
- **Set clear limits, without anger, if your child acts out toward the baby.** Occasionally a toddler may try to hit or otherwise show physical anger toward a new sibling. This is very normal. Older 2-year-olds, while quite verbal, may not have the words to express the strong feelings they are experiencing so they resort to action. First, remind your child of what you *want* him to do: *Be gentle*. If the behavior continues, then use a serious (not angry) voice to set the limit for your child—*No hitting the baby. Hitting hurts*. Avoid having your child sit alone or otherwise isolating him. This can only intensify feelings of jealousy or resentment toward the baby. Instead, show him how to touch the baby in gentle ways. Most importantly, never leave your baby alone with an older sibling. Even a toddler with loving motives can accidentally hurt a baby.
- **Stay supportive even if your toddler goes back to using more "baby-ish" behavior.** Toddlers who are adjusting to a new baby in the family often regress in one area or another, be it sleep, potty-training, or by returning to more "baby-ish" behaviors like using a pacifier or bottle again, or wanting to be held and carried. Waking at night provides the attention they miss during the day and the reassurance that they're still loved and cared for. The key is to keep routines consistent, especially with sleep, while also making plenty of time for cuddling and nurturing your toddler. Over time, she will return to her usual behaviors.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Whip Up Some Oobleck.** What's oobleck? It's a mixture that, when you touch it, you say, "Oooo...bleck!" This is a great activity for curious toddlers that combines cooking and play. Together with your child, mix 1/3 cup of water and five to seven drops of food coloring (optional) in a plastic bowl. Slowly add 1 cup of corn starch, without stirring. Let the oobleck stand for 1-2 minutes. Then suggest that your child grab some in his hands. You'll discover that the oobleck, when squeezed, turns into a hard ball. When your child opens his hand, the oobleck will turn back into a liquid. Through this activity children learn science concepts, such as *liquid/solid*, and the ability to follow directions. You are also building your child's language skills as you talk about your observations.
- **Wrap and Roll.** Give your child a roll of toilet paper. Ask her: *What do you think we can do with this?* You will be amazed to discover what she does. The toilet paper, unrolled, might become a road. Or it may be a dragon's tail. Let your child unroll and spread it out to her heart's content—and then make cleaning up fun by having a contest to see who can gather up the most paper in one minute. Games like this encourage creativity, pretend play, and symbolic thinking skills. 🌀



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 36

What to Expect From Your Toddler's Development

As you review the chart below, keep in mind that development is not a race and that every child grows at her own pace and in her own way. Your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated below and still be on track. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider or other trusted professional..

Your Child's Development from 30 to 36 Months

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>My body lets me do "big kid" stuff now! I may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedal a tricycle. • Dress myself with your help. • Draw a line. • Turn a knob or unscrew a cap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child scribble with markers and crayons. This builds early writing skills. • Give your child chances to practice new physical skills like pedaling and climbing. • Child-proof again so that your child's new ability to open caps and doorknobs doesn't lead to danger. • Limit TV time and head outside. Take nature hikes, walk to the playground, or throw a ball around.
<p>I use language to express my thoughts and feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 3, I might use as many as 900 words. • I understand sentences with two or more ideas (<i>You can have a cookie when we get home</i>). • I ask questions. • I am learning my first and last name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new, longer, or more difficult words to build your child's vocabulary: <i>Is your snack scrumptious?</i> • Read books, sing songs, and play rhyming games with real and nonsense words that you and your child make up. • Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer: <i>Where do you think the squirrel is taking that nut?</i>
<p>I am using my new thinking skills to solve problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can remember what happened yesterday. I understand the meaning of <i>now</i>, <i>soon</i>, and <i>later</i>. • I'm becoming a <i>logical thinker</i>. That's why I ask <i>Why?</i> all the time! I want to know the reason for things. • When I am pretending that it is bedtime for Teddy, I put a blanket on him and sing him a lullaby. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child about her day before bedtime. This builds memory and language skills. • Be patient with your child's "Why" questions. Ask your child about her ideas. When she asks, <i>Why do dogs bark?</i> Ask her what she thinks before you provide the answer. This builds thinking skills and creativity. • Encourage your child to use logic in everyday situations: <i>It is raining. What do we need in order to stay dry?</i>

Chart continued on next page



Your toddler enjoys playing with other children and may have one or two favorite friends.

What Your Toddler Can Do	What You Can Do to Connect With Your Toddler
<p>I can do so many things by myself!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I may help get myself dressed, brush my teeth, and wash my hands. • I love to help out around the house. It makes me feel strong and important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to help in caring for himself, if you want him to be independent. Taking care of oneself can build self-esteem. • Give your child lots of chances to help out. Put away clothes together, set the table, pick up leaves in the yard.
<p>My friends are very important to me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like playing with other children. I may have one or two favorite friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help your child deal with conflicts around sharing or turn-taking: <i>There is only one shovel and bucket. I will put the timer on and you will each have 5 minutes to play with it. While you wait for your turn, you can play with the cars.</i>
<p>I am starting to notice similarities and differences in people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I might comment on different skin colors or body shapes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help your child understand and appreciate his own culture and background. Talk respectfully about others who are different from you. • Use embarrassing moments as chances to explain, without judgment, that people are different in many ways — size, skin color, style of dress, and so on.



from Baby to BIG Kid

Month 36

What It's Like for Your Child

Cara and I were pretending to be birds. Let's put the nest over here, I said. Cara grabbed the red striped blanket: Okay, I'll make the nest. She carefully wound the blanket up in a circle and sat inside. All of a sudden, I felt upset—jealous and mad. I said: I wanted that blanket. The red blanket is mine. Cara looked upset. No, it's not. It's mine! I made the nest so it's mine. I grabbed the red blanket and Cara started to cry. Mommy came in. I started to cry too because I thought I was going to get in trouble.

Instead, Mommy said: One blanket, two girls, what can we do? She kneeled down and put her arms around us. Maybe we need another blanket. I know a nice yellow one that will look great with the red. I jumped up and shouted, I know the one, I'll get it! It's on my bed. I came back with the blanket and made my own nest. Then Cara and I ran around the room collecting blocks and laying them all over the floor. Cara pointed at the blocks and said, Okay, all the worms are in the forest. I curled up in the yellow nest: Cara, you be the mommy bird. Tweet, tweet, I'm the baby bird. Feed me! Cara ran to get a "worm" and "fed" me. I made gobbling sounds and said, Yummy worm, Mommy! Cara rubbed my head: Now it's night-night, baby bird!

What Your Toddler Is Learning

Social-Emotional Skills:

- The joy of close friendships as the two girls enjoy their playtime together
- Conflict resolution skills as the girls resolve their disagreement with an adult's help and without being hurtful to one another
- Empathy—when Cara gently rubs her friend's head when she is pretending to be her mother

Language and Thinking Skills:

- Creative thinking when Cara suggests making a nest from a blanket
- Role-playing when the girls take on the roles and feeding preferences of birds
- Symbolic thinking skills when the girls can imagine that the blocks are worms and the blankets are nests
- Logical thinking skills when the girls take on the roles of baby and mother bird, and the baby tells the mother bird to feed her (making the logical connection that parents are responsible for providing meals to their children)

Physical Skills:

- Large motor skills (using arm and leg muscles) when the girls turn the blanket into nests and run around the room collecting and placing blocks
- Small motor skills (using the muscles in hands and fingers) when the girls pick the blocks up to eat them as worms

Did You Know...

The average preschooler (aged 3 to 6) has one tantrum per day, and the tantrum lasts about 3 minutes?

*Reference: Belden, A.C., et al. (2008 January). Temper tantrums in healthy versus depressed and disruptive preschoolers: Defining tantrum behavior associated with clinical problems. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 152, 117+*



If your child is starting preschool or another group experience this fall, you may be approaching this major milestone with conflicting emotions.

What the Research Means for You

You're not alone. All children "lose it" occasionally. But as children grow, parents sometimes question whether it's normal for their preschooler to still have tantrums and wonder if they should seek help.

This research identified five key "worry" factors that may indicate a need to seek support and assistance from your child's health care provider or a child development specialist. These professionals work with families to understand more about what triggers a child's tantrums and how to help the child cope more effectively with his feelings.

The five "worry" factors included:

1. Aggression with violent, destructive behavior (frequent kicking, hitting, throwing, and breaking objects)
2. Self-injurious behavior—when children purposefully hurt themselves during a tantrum
3. Excessive frequency—tantrums on 10-20 days per month or more than five times per day
4. Extended length—tantrums lasting more than 25 minutes
5. Limited self-soothing skills—when children are unable to calm themselves without a lot of assistance

If you are seeing one or more of these symptoms in your preschooler, talk with your pediatrician, a child development specialist, or a mental health counselor who has experience with young children to see if there may be additional ways you can support your child.

Spotlight on: Preparing for Preschool

If your child is starting preschool or another group experience this fall, you may be approaching this major milestone with conflicting emotions. You're probably excited about all the fun your child will have and the new friends she'll make. At the same time, you may feel a little sad that your baby is venturing out into the big world without you. These emotions are normal. Your child is also bound to have a host of feelings about this transition, feeling proud to be a big kid but at the same time worried about being separated from you and starting something unfamiliar.

Having Fun With Preschool Prep

There is a lot you can do in the weeks leading up to the big day. But try to keep your efforts low key. If you make too big a deal out of this milestone, your child may end up being more worried than excited. Here are some ideas to keep the focus on fun.

- **Use pretend play to explore the idea of preschool.** Take turns being the parent, child, and teacher. Act out common daily routines, such as saying good-bye to mommy and/or daddy, taking off his coat, singing songs, reading stories, having Circle Time, playing outside, and taking naps. Reassure your child that preschool is a good place where he will have fun and learn. Answer his questions patiently. This helps children feel more in control, which reduces their anxiety.
- **Read books about preschool.** There are many books about going to preschool available from the public library in your area. Choose several to share with your child over the summer before school starts. Talk about the story and how the characters are feeling. Ask how your child is feeling.



Children pick up on the reactions of the trusted adults in their lives. So try not to look worried or sad, and don't linger too long.

- **Make a game out of practicing self-help skills, such as:** unzipping her coat, hanging her coat on a hook, putting on her backpack, fastening her shoes. You might want to have a “contest” with your child to see how quickly she can put on her shoes. Or play “pretend school” and have her take off her coat, zip her backpack closed, and sit “criss-cross applesauce.” If your child will be bringing lunch, have her help you make a lunch, pack it up, and have a picnic together. This will give her the chance to practice opening her lunch box and unwrapping her sandwich—important skills for preschool!
- **Play at your new preschool.** Visit your child's preschool together. Play on the school playground a few times before your child starts the program. These visits increase your child's comfort with and confidence in this new setting.

On Your Child's First Day...

- **Plan to stay a little while.** Staying for 15-30 minutes on that first morning can help ease the transition to preschool. Together, the two of you can explore the classroom, meet some other children, and play with a few toys. When you see that your child is comfortable, it is time to leave. If he is having a harder time getting engaged, you may want to ask your child's teacher to stay with your child as you say good-bye so that when you leave, he can turn to another caring adult for support.
- **Keep your tone positive and upbeat.** Children pick up on the reactions of the trusted adults in their lives. So try not to look worried or sad, and don't linger too long. Say a quick, upbeat good-bye and reassure your child that all will be well.
- **Think about creating a special good-bye routine.** For example, you can give your child a kiss on her palm to “hold” all day long. Or, the two of you can sing a special song together before you leave. Good-bye routines are comforting to children and help them understand and prepare for what will happen next.
- **Resist the rescue.** Try not to run back in to the classroom if you hear your child crying, as upsetting as this can be. This is a big change and your child may, quite understandably, feel sad and a little scared. But if you run back in, it sends the message that he is only okay if you are there. It may prolong your child's distress and make it harder for him to adapt. Rest assured, teachers have many years of experience with helping families make the shift to preschool. Instead, you can wait outside the classroom for a few minutes to ensure that all is well, or call the school later in the morning to check in.

Let's Play: Activities That Nurture Bonding and Learning

- **Name Hop.** Gather together 15-20 pieces of paper. Neatly print your child's name on 10 of the sheets. On the other pages, write a few names of family members or friends (*Mommy, Daddy, Grammy Tommy*, a pet's name, etc.). Make a path on the floor with the word cards, mixing them all up. While she won't be able to read the other names, you want her to begin to recognize her own name as different from the others. Show your child her name (or see if she can recognize it). Ask her if she can hop along the path you've made, stepping only on her name. Games like this develop literacy, language, balance, and coordination.
- **Outline Time.** Cut open several brown paper bags and tape them together to make a sheet of paper as large as your child (you can also ask in the meat department of your grocery store for a 3-foot length of butcher paper). Ask your child to lay on the paper while you trace her outline with a marker. The two of you can decorate his outline with paint, markers, and crayons. You can also glue on yarn “hair,” buttons, sparkles, or ribbons. Games like this develop self-awareness (of one's size and appearance), early writing skills (as your child draws), and fine motor skills as she uses the small muscles in her hands to glue small pieces like buttons. 