



The Two-Year-Old: Personality Changes

Two-year-olds are wonderful, exciting, busy and very demanding. They've come a long way in two years and there's much more growing ahead! This fact sheet is designed to provide information that might be helpful as you play with and care for the two-year-old in your life.

Developing independence

Toddlerhood is a time to gain some independence or freedom from mothers, fathers, and other adults. Your toddler may show independence by making choices and by learning to help himself.

For example, he can decide to wear his blue shirt or red shirt. He can dress himself with just a little help from an adult. When allowed to make choices, children feel worthwhile and successful. They enjoy trying new things because they feel capable.

Have you heard your toddler shout, "Me do it!" and you know there isn't the slightest chance she can "do it?" She has a healthy sense of independence! Try saying, "Let's do it together!" or "How about some teamwork?" rather than "You can't do that, you're too little." Keep in mind that it's important for her to feel powerful and successful.

Sometimes it's difficult to know when to stay out of your toddler's way and when to step in and help. Since he's so thrilled with his accomplishments – "Look at me!" – try to let him do as much as possible on his own. If he becomes frustrated, be sure to offer help. Frustration often leads to temper tantrums.

You are the best judge of what your toddler can and can't do. Watch to see what frustrates your child. If he gets hysterical because he can't unwrap the straw that goes with his juice box, get it started for him. Sometimes, toys can become overwhelming. Try to redirect your toddler to another activity. This won't work every time, so be ready to remove your child from the situation. When you do, allow him to calm down. Then try putting his feelings into words. You might say "It really frustrates you when those pieces of your puzzle won't fit together." You might also give him a choice, "Would you like me to help you or would you like to play with your blocks instead?" Remove toys which always frustrate your child. Try them again in a few months.

Guidance

Your toddler is growing and changing rapidly. As she grows, your expectations change. You want her to learn table manners, to learn to use the bathroom and to learn that she can't always do what she wants to do. For



now, you want your child to obey you. Yet, before long, you'll want her to do what's right even when you're not around. You want your child to gain responsibility or self-control. Parents and caregivers can help children develop a sense of responsibility.

Try to:

- Tell your toddler what you want her to do rather than what you don't want her to do. Say, "Hang your coat on the hook." instead of, "Don't throw your coat on the floor."
- Get your toddler's attention before you speak. For example, turn off the TV, kneel down to your child's level, look directly at him, gently hold him and wait until he looks at you.
- Use action as well as words. For example, you might point to the toys that you want her to pick up, as you mention their names.
- Use short sentences, speak slowly and give one instruction at a time. Young children have short memories. They can remember only one instruction. Say, "Put your doll in her crib" then "Wash your hands" then "Sit at the table" rather than "Put your doll away, wash up and sit down at the table."
- When you request something, give a reason. This will help your child understand what you're asking. He'll remember the reason the next time, when you've told him many times! For example, "Hang your coat on the hook. You may trip over it if you leave it on the floor."
- Give choices when possible. For example, say, "Judy is still riding the tricycle, so you'll have to wait until she's finished. You could play with the wagon or climb the jungle gym. Which would you like to do?"
- Reinforce or reward your child when she does what you ask. Use statements that show children you approve of their actions. Say, "Thank you, Hannah, for putting the toys in the toy box" or "Good for you! You came to lunch when I asked."
- Never hit, slap or spank a child. It may stop a behavior for the moment, but you aren't helping your child to develop self control or responsibility. What are you teaching him? You're teaching that it's okay to hit others when you are angry and want your own way. Most adults don't want children to learn this lesson.

Older toddlers can sense when they're about to be disciplined. They will try to avoid the situation. When you ask, "Why did you pick those flowers?" your toddler may reply, "I made a tunnel in room." Don't worry, you aren't going crazy, and she's not going deaf. This is the way many young children deal with being put on the spot. When you think about it, it works pretty well! Toddlers are sensitive to the reactions of others, and they embarrass easily. They may tell others, "Don't look" or "Don't laugh."

It takes children a long time to learn to read or do math problems. It also takes them a very long time to learn the rules of their family and society.

Sources:

Grow! A newsletter for parents of toddlers. Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.
Child Development: Infancy, toddlerhood and the preschool years. Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Arkansas.
Brazelton, T.B. Touchstones. (1992). Addison Wesley.
Papalia, D.E. & Olds, S.W. A Child's World. (1996). McGraw Hill.



Visit our website: ceinfo.unh.edu

UNH Cooperative Extension programs and policies are consistent with pertinent Federal and State laws and regulations on non-discrimination regarding age, color, handicap, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veterans status.

