



The Two-Year-Old: Play

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 factsheet is designed to provide information that might be helpful as you play with and care for the two-year-old in your life.

Toys and play

Toys are important to the growth and development of children. Because of their increase in size and coordination, toddlers are ready to play with many toys and materials. Through play, children use their muscles, develop their imaginations and learn about the world around them. Some toys and materials which delight toddlers include:



For active play and physical development:

- Large hollow blocks (can be made from milk cartons with the ends taped shut)
- A wagon large enough to climb into and out of
- Small tricycles
- Blocks that can be joined together
- Push and pull toys such as automobiles, trucks and trains
- A "tunnel" made from a large cardboard box
- A sand pile
- A large container of water with items to float, sink and pour
- Pots and pans from the kitchen

For imaginative play:

- Dolls-unbreakable and washable
- House play materials: brooms, dust pans, dust cloths, mops, a table and chairs
- Unbreakable dishes
- Stuffed animals

For creative and constructive play:

- Play dough
- Paints (nontoxic), brushes, sponge pieces, large pieces of paper
- Blunt scissors
- Large wooden beads
- Large crayons
- Rings pyramided on wooden pegs

Remember that toddlers are happiest when they can keep moving. They have short attention spans and are always switching from one activity to another.

Experimenting with materials and toys, without input from adults, is a great way for little ones to learn about the world. You may want to show a child how to draw a house or where to put a puzzle piece, but try not to. Let him figure it out for himself.

At this stage of childhood, your child will learn more by just holding a paintbrush and spreading paint onto a large piece of paper. Toddlers don't care about the final product. They are more interested in the process – how things look, feel, smell, taste, and change. Don't expect your toddler to “finish” a painting, a puzzle or anything else!

What to say

What do you say when presented with a smeary painting or a blobby something-or-other your child has made out of clay? If you say, “What a scary snake,” you could hurt her feelings if she meant it to be a hotdog. Children also see right through phony compliments. So don't say “How lovely, it's just beautiful!” unless you really mean it. The best way to praise your child's work is to talk about how he has done it. Say:



- “Look at the circles. They go round and round.”
- “Let's try to name each color you used.”
- “I can see you've learned to make a triangle.”
- “I like the way you twisted the clay.”
- “You must have worked very hard to cover the whole piece of paper.”

If you praise your child in this way, no one becomes embarrassed because the painting was supposed to be a bird, but looks like an elephant.

Getting along with other children

A toddler is only mildly interested in other children. Adults often wonder if their toddlers are “normal” because they don't play well with children their own age. At this stage of development, toddlers seldom play with other children. They may play next to or near them, and this is called parallel play. At about three years of age, a child will play with others. Still, even then, children hoard their toys and refuse to share. They cooperate and play together for only short periods.

Because adults don't want their children to be hurt physically or emotionally, adults sometimes interfere with normal toddler play. They become involved in squabbles. Toddlers learn more when parents “let them go” to work some situations through for themselves. This is one way they learn about other people's behavior and feelings. This is one way they learn to get along in the world.

Sources:

Young children's play and toys, Cooperative Extension Service, Washington State University.

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