



Learning, Play, and Your 1- to 2-Year-Old

Your child transitions from baby to toddler during the second year of life, and first steps give way to walking well. As your toddler starts exploring, be sure to childproof your home to prevent household accidents.

During this time, your child also makes major strides in understanding language and figuring out how to communicate. At 12 months, he or she will likely start to use hand gestures and point to things. Gradually, your child's vocabulary will grow from one or two words to 50 words or more. By the second birthday, you'll probably lose count of the number of words your toddler can say!

Tantrums become more prominent during the toddler years, and it's likely that your child will get frustrated from time to time. When you see a tantrum coming on, try to create a distraction with a book or interesting toy. Avoid letting your child get too tired or hungry, particularly when he or she is trying to master new tasks, as those feelings often set the stage for tantrums. Toys and games that are age-appropriate promote feelings of satisfaction when your child masters and enjoys them before moving on to more challenging tasks.

What Is My Child Learning?

While learning to walk during the second year of life, kids will also start becoming increasingly independent. But expect your child to fluctuate between wanting freedom and clinging to you for comfort and reassurance. So allow the freedom to explore but be there when you're needed.

Hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity will also improve during this time. Your child will have better control over fingers and hands and can explore toys and surroundings more than before. Look for toys that encourage this.

How your child plays is also changing. As an infant, your child may have "played" with toys by shaking, banging, or throwing them. Your toddler now is aware of the function of objects, so is more likely to stack blocks, listen or talk into a toy phone, or push a toy car. In addition, the concept of pretend play starts to emerge. Your child may pretend to drink from an empty cup, use a banana as a phone, or imagine a block is a car.

Many parents introduce play dates now. Your child will probably enjoy having other kids around, but don't expect them to "play" cooperatively with each other or to be enthusiastic about sharing toys. Have plenty of toys for everyone and be prepared to intervene when the kids don't want to share. Older siblings can serve as role models when it comes to teaching, sharing, and taking turns.

Your child is also learning about language through interaction with you and other caregivers. Most infants say their first word around 1 year of age. During year two, vocabulary increases slowly over the first 6 months and then expands rapidly during the second 6 months. Between 18 and 24 months of age, many toddlers can say 50 words or more and can use simple two-word sentences. Their understanding of language also improves — expect toddlers to understand much more than they can express.

If it hasn't come up yet, your child may develop separation anxiety, crying and clinging to you when you try to leave and resisting attention from others.

The onset of separation anxiety — and how long it lasts — varies widely from child to child. It typically starts around 9 months of age, but some kids experience it later. This will gradually improve as your child acquires the language and social skills to cope with strange situations and starts to learn that the separation is not permanent.

How Can I Encourage My Child to Learn?

Once toddlers learn to walk, there's no turning back. Yours will want to keep moving to build on this newfound skill. Provide lots of opportunities for being active and learning and exploring in safe surroundings.

Games that your child might enjoy include peekaboo, pat-a-cake, and chasing games. Toddlers love to imitate adults and are fascinated with housework. Provide age-appropriate toys that will encourage this, such as a toy vacuum to use while you're cleaning or pots, pans, and spoons to play with while you're cooking.

Other toys that your child might enjoy include:

- brightly colored balls
- blocks, stacking and nesting toys
- fat crayons or markers
- age-appropriate animal or people figures and dolls
- toy cars and trains
- shape sorters, peg boards
- simple puzzles
- push, pull, and riding toys

Reading continues to be important. Your child will likely be able to follow along with a story and point to objects in the pictures as you name them. Encourage your child to name the pictures he or she recognizes.

Have conversations about the books you read and the events of the day. Ask questions and encourage your toddler to reply by waiting for a response. Support your child's efforts by repeating and expanding on those replies.

Keep in mind that there is a wide range of what is normal for young children, and some toddlers develop slower or faster than others. Talk with your child's doctor if you have any concerns.

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Date reviewed: January 2006

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