



The Senses and Your 1- to 2-Year-Old

Your baby's senses are maturing rapidly, and so is his or her understanding of the surrounding world. As the size of your child's world grows, he or she will be seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching things that are all new.

Sight

Between 1 and 2 years old, your baby's sight will improve dramatically. By the time a child is 2, he or she usually has 20/20 vision and can see details and appreciate all colors. Your role is to provide pleasant, stimulating visual information.

Picture books, colorful toys, and other children are great things for your baby to look at and learn about. By naming objects and their color, for instance, you will put your toddler on the road to saying words and learning the name of colors. Be aware of disturbing or scary images toward the end of this period, though - your toddler is not able to distinguish between the real and the imaginary yet.

Take your baby on frequent outings. The park, the grocery store, and a friend's house can all provide interesting and novel sights and will continue to teach your toddler about the unlimited potential of life.

Hearing

No matter when your child says those first words, it's a sure bet he or she will understand much of what you say well before that. He or she should be able to respond to commands ("Roll the ball to Mommy or Daddy") and should be fully aware of the names of familiar objects and family members. By about 15 months, your child will be able to point to different body parts, even if he or she can't yet tell you their different names.

This tells you that your baby's hearing is functioning well and helping develop your baby's language skills. Although your toddler may know a handful of words, he or she is still indicating wants and ideas in non-verbal ways. Your child will also enjoy the other pleasures of hearing: listening to children's songs and music, laughing and yelling with friends in the park, having you read a bedtime story.

Taste and Smell

Newfound language skills will let your toddler tell you which tastes he or she prefers and which ones he or she doesn't. At this age your child will probably like bland foods the best. Pasta, dairy, and chicken tend to be favorites. But don't forget to offer a variety of foods to taste - fight the urge to give your child only what he or she likes. Research tells us that it can take up to 15 occasions before a child will accept a new flavor. Just keep providing opportunities to try new things, and one day your child will surprise you by accepting!

You can help your child label tastes and smells by using descriptive words during mealtime or trips to restaurants.

Touch

Although your child may seem too busy exploring to enjoy your touch, a cuddle or kiss from you is still a necessary part of your toddler's life. Your child is experiencing and understanding so much more, but underlying that willingness to explore is the knowledge that he or she is loved and secure. Take every opportunity to show this.

Don't forget that little fingers this age will be into everything. Hopefully you've already baby-proofed your home well, but as your child grows taller, take another look around from a toddler perspective and put unsafe items out of reach. Then you can encourage your child to touch and learn as much as possible.

This is also the age when toddlers start to use their hands to show when they're frustrated or looking for attention, so don't be surprised if your little one starts hitting. Although this is very common, it's an opportunity to teach your child that hands are not for hitting. Initially, finding a distraction may be all that is needed; however, using "time-outs" may be necessary if the hitting persists.

Should I Be Concerned?

By now you have probably addressed any concerns you've had about your baby's eyesight, but be sure to contact your child's doctor if any of the following irregularities develop during this time period:

- eyes that wander in or out
- inability to see or recognize distant objects or people
- persistent tearing, fluid discharge, crusting, or redness of the eyes
- eyes that don't move together
- frequent squinting or sensitivity to light
- droopy eyelids
- pupils of different sizes
- excessive eye rubbing or scratching

Hearing problems may become more apparent during this stage because of the emergence of speech. Some kids speak earlier or later than others, but there should be signs that they can understand simple instructions even if they are not yet using many words.

Don't hesitate to report any concerns you have to your child's doctor, especially if you feel your child is not babbling or responding to your speech patterns. Chronic ear infections can sometimes leave children with excessive fluid buildup that can interfere with healthy hearing. Special tests can check for hearing loss at any age.

At this age it's very common for parents to feel concerned or frustrated with a child's behavior, as he or she touches and explores everything. Toddlers are naturally very busy and curious little people, so it's important to make sure that yours has a safe environment to explore. If you are not sure about how to guide your toddler's behavior, talk to your child's doctor.

Reviewed by: Barbara P. Homeier, MD

Date reviewed: September 2005

Originally reviewed by: Steven Dowshen, MD

[About Us](#) / [Contact Us](#) / [Partners](#) / [Editorial Policy](#) / [Privacy Policy & Terms of Use](#)



Note: All information on KidsHealth is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

©1995-2006 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.