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21-25 Months

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Your Changing Child

This topic falls under the domain of **Early Childhood Development** and the emphasis is **General Child Development: Process of Development**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Understand that development is individual, progresses in stages, and occurs in predictable patterns.
- Realize that development includes a range of interrelated skills and competencies.
- Set reasonable expectations for their child's abilities and behavior.

When thinking about the development of your child right now, the most important element operating is the child's conflicting need for both attachment *and* exploration. Much of toddlerhood can be understood in terms of the child's gradually coming to grips with these two needs. When you realize how this conflict uniquely affects your child, you can better respect and respond to a variety of formerly inexplicable behaviors.

One of the first expressions of this state of mind is your child's awareness that "me" and "you" are different. For instance, your child likes to splash in the bath; he now knows that Daddy doesn't like it when he does. He's not hungry, but Mom says it's time for dinner. From these clues, your child begins to understand that he is a separate individual and that people's agendas can conflict. This awareness can make it seem like your child has split into two selves: a defiant self and a cooperative self. When you say, "Come here," your child has to do the opposite to know he's in charge of his own body. He doesn't do the opposite of what you want because he is "out to get you," but to reassure himself that he is a separate individual.

The upside of realizing that "me" and "you" are different is when your child realizes that others have feelings, too, and that they may be different from her own. At this age, you may find your child bringing a blanket to a crying baby or patting your arm if you are upset. It's too early to call this "empathy," but it is the beginning of a growing awareness of the emotions of other people.

Children this age begin to say "no," as this is the only way they know to express the idea that "I'm me and not you." They may seem bossy as they try to control their world. Again, the conflicts they feel may make them clingy one minute and independent the next. They will probably want whoever is not available. It's a roller coaster time for

parent and child alike. For many children, “separation anxiety” peaks around this age. Children become more demanding of attention from the parent that’s been their primary caregiver, sometimes in comical ways like insisting that “Mommy talks only to me.”

As the connections in your child’s brain increase around the age of 2, she also becomes able to keep a mental picture of two things in her mind. This means a child can now see what *is* and what *might be*. Where once she was happy with either the blue cup or the red cup, now she realizes that choosing one means *not* having the other. Her sense of time, however, is strictly limited to the present. If she chooses the blue cup, the red cup is gone forever; if she chooses milk to drink, juice is gone forever. No wonder toddlers have so much trouble making up their minds! Sometimes, it may be easier to give a little of *both* choices.

Children this age live in the present moment, in a world without the adult concept of “time.” Words such as *soon*, *later*, *today*, *tomorrow*, and *next week* have no meaning. To them, if it isn’t *now*, it’s *never*. This may help you understand why toddlers seem unable to hurry, especially if *you’re* in a rush. Around the age of 21 months, however, children begin to figure out that one thing often follows another. They pay close attention to sequence and *sequence becomes their clock*. This helps explain why they get so upset if you do things out of order (imagine if someone kept resetting *your* clock!).

Without sequence, toddlers live in the middle of an overwhelming collection of disconnected events. Imagine someone telling you, for no understandable reason, when to eat, bathe, or sleep. Life would feel completely out of control, just as it can to toddlers. Parents can help with these feelings by providing a lot of structure and by keeping routines as familiar, regular, and orderly as possible.

Another key trait of toddlers is that they are “long on will and short on skill.” This means that they are frequently frustrated by their body’s inability to do what their mind thinks it should do, and by their inability to express their thoughts and feelings with language. When they *are* successful at one of these things, they want to repeat it over and over, which can be trying to a parent’s patience.

Although it may be difficult at times, trying to understand your child’s mind can be a big help to him as he tries to cope with the world. It also can be a way for you as an adult to appreciate the wonder of his fresh and eager approach to life.

Resources:

The Emotional Life of the Toddler by Alicia F. Lieberman, Ph.D.

Is This a Phase? by Helen F. Neville, R.N.

Discussion Questions Your Changing Child

1. Being a parent right now is great fun because . . .

2. Being a parent right now is a challenge because . . .

3. How have routines helped your child through the day?

4. How have the following emotional dichotomies played out in your child?
 - Being close vs. being independent
 - Being overprotected vs. free exploration
 - Being controlled vs. feeling personal power

At-Home Page Your Changing Child

Your toddler's need to explore is so great at this age that safety must be a primary concern of parents. Try to make your home a place where your child can obey his need to explore in a safe way. Remember, there's no substitute for supervision at this age. Children can't be expected to keep themselves safe, even if they "know" the rules.

Here are some suggestions for various hazards:

Burns

- Cover all electrical outlets with plastic caps.
- Keep cords from irons and other hot electrical appliances up and out of reach.
- Be sure the water heater is set no higher than 120 degrees.

Choking

- Remove objects and toys with small pieces (less than 1½ inches in diameter). This includes coins, watch batteries, marbles, pen tops, beads, buttons, hard candy, balloons, and plastic bags.
- Encourage your child to eat sitting down. Avoid foods such as popcorn, whole grapes, raw carrots, hard candies, and hot dogs, unless cut lengthwise first, and then into small pieces.

Water

- Eliminate sources of accessible water, such as an unsupervised wading pool, mop bucket, or fish tank. Purchase and use locking devices on toilet seats. Remember, children can drown in less than 2 inches of water.

Falls

- Place safety gates across stairwells. Gates can also be used to keep toddlers in rooms where they can be supervised.
- Keep doors to the outside, garage, and stairwells locked.
- Pad sharp corners of tables and chairs.
- Eliminate tripping hazards; clear pathways of furniture and toys.

Poisons

- Store medications (including vitamins and other nonprescription drugs), automotive and garden chemicals, and cleaning supplies in a locked cabinet. Remember, high shelves are not always safe from "climbers."
- Check for and remove poisonous plants from indoor and outdoor environments.

Strangulation

- Avoid old clothing with drawstrings around the head or neck.
- Make sure that strings on pull toys are no longer than 14 inches. Supervise their use closely.
- Fasten cords from curtains and blinds so they are inaccessible.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

I'm Two Years Old by Jerri Wolfe.

Me, Myself and I by Kyle D. Pruett, M.D.

Positive Discipline: The First Three Years Jane Nelsen, Ed.D., Cheryl Erwin, and Roslyn Ann Duffy.

Suggested Books for Children:

I Can Do It, Too! by Karen Baicker.

Hooray for Harry by Kim Lewis.

Quack Daisy, Quack by Jane Simmons.

Where is the Green Sheep? by Mem Fox.

Helping Children with Separation Issues

This topic falls under the domain of **Parent-Child Relationship** and the emphasis is **Attachment/Autonomy: Trust**

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Understand that responsive caregiving helps to develop trust, enabling children to explore and form other relationships.
- Respond to their children in sensitive, supportive and caring ways.

The drive for independence is a natural and normal outgrowth of healthy attachment. All the months of love and patient responses you have given to your child have made your presence very important. The time and effort you have spent strengthening the bond between the two of you, and the feelings of security and confidence your child has gained, now form the firm ground from which he ventures forth.

This is the age when children will test limits. They want to see what it's like to walk away from you. They wonder, *"What will happen if I say 'no'?" "Will Mom still love me if I am angry at her?"* But even as they walk away from you, they may be looking back over their shoulders or running back to touch base with a quick hug.

If *you* try to walk away, though, be prepared for what is called "separation anxiety." Your child may want to experiment with leaving you, at least for a moment, but may react in the extreme if you try the same thing. He doesn't want you to leave, because he fears losing you and, because his lack of understanding of time makes it difficult for him know when you will return. Your child wants you around, if only for the security you give him – the security that enables him to continue his push to become separate from you. At times like this, the puzzlement of parents is a mirror of the confusion children feel as they are torn between conflicting desires—for dependence and for independence.

Children also go through periods of difficult separations at times of rapid growth or increased fears. In fact, the crying, clinging, and wanting to be held that looks like regression can be a sign of more sophisticated awareness on the part of the child. Even children who have never shown signs of separation anxiety may suddenly start crying when you leave.

Not all children exhibit extreme separation anxiety. Some may cry loudly, some may whimper. Some may cling, some may seem depressed. Some may just say *"Bye-bye"* and toddle off. Just as children don't react in the same ways to all life experiences, from trying a new food to missing a nap, they don't all react the same way to separation.

The child who handles separation easily is just temperamentally different from the child who reacts intensely, and probably handles other challenges easily as well.

The degree of separation anxiety does not indicate the strength or health of the attachment between parent and child. The key is for the parent to be aware of the child's unique needs and to respond sensitively to them. *"Children who [feel] secure that they can get what they need wind up confident in themselves,"* says Alan Sroufe, a researcher at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 14, 1995).

Resources:

Your Toddler by Richard R. Rubin, Ph.D, John J. Fisher III, and Susan G. Doering, Ph.D.

"On This Day, the Mother-Child Attachment is the Focus" by Sally Apgar.
Minneapolis Star Tribune, May 14, 1995.

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser.

Is This a Phase? Child Development & Parent Strategies, Birth to 6 Years by Helen F. Neville, B.S., R.N.

Discussion Questions
Helping Children with Separation Issues

1. How does your child act when separating from you?
2. What feelings do you have when your child clings to you and doesn't want you to leave? How do you feel when your child barely acknowledges your departure?
3. Describe the connection you have observed between your child's development and her response to separation.
4. How can you make leaving your child with another caregiver easier for your child and for you?

At-Home Page

Helping Children with Separation Issues

Try some of these ways to ease your child's separation anxiety:

- Play a lot of "peek-a-boo" type games. Hiding and finding toys helps children learn that people and things still exist even when they are out of sight.
- Always tell your child that you are leaving and that you will be back. It's best not to sneak away. Build on, don't break down, the trust that has grown between you. As you tell your child when you will return, state it in relation to an activity, such as, "*I will see you after you have music time and snack.*" Children don't understand the concept of time at this age, so saying you'll be back in an hour won't mean much.
- Similarly, don't try to prepare the child much in advance; phrases like "*in a little while*" or "*this evening*" will mean nothing to her. Ten or fifteen minutes before you leave, simply and honestly state that you are leaving and that you will return.
- Expect your child to react, but try not to cry or be visibly upset in front of her. If you remain calm and confident in your child's ability to handle the separation, it will help her manage, too.
- Try telling your child what to do while you're gone. Setting her up with specific projects gives a comforting sense that everything is still under control and gives her something else to think about.
- Help your child by naming and reflecting back his feelings of fear, sadness, or anger. It may help to predict a happy outcome, saying something like "*I see you are really sad now. I hope you will have fun when you are done feeling sad.*"
- These practical ideas may help ease separation while attending school:
 - Show your child where you'll be.
 - Hang your coats next to each other in your locker.
 - Bring a "lovey" or transitional object from home (a blanket, toy, picture of the family) or give him something from your purse or pocket.
- When you're together again, first reconnect emotionally with your child, with a hug, for instance, before asking what they did that day.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Learning to Say Goodbye: Starting School and Other Early Childhood Separations by Nancy Balaban, Ed.D.

Suggested Books for Children:

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell.

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn.

You Go Away by Dorothy Corey.

Don't Go! By Jane Breskin Zalben.

Video:

Baby Songs by Hi-Tops Video (My Mommy Comes Back.)

Reasonable Expectations for Parents

This topic falls under the domain of **Parent Development** and the emphasis is **Changing Parent Role: Balancing Parent-Child Needs**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Identify the role parental self-esteem has in creation of a child's self-esteem.
- Set realistic expectations for themselves.
- Maintain their personal overall health and well-being.

"Being a parent is a tug-of-war between who we think we should be and who we are; between what we want to do and what we are actually able to do."

This quotation from Stephanie Marston's book, **The Magic of Encouragement**, captures perfectly the balancing act all parents face. The desire to be a "good" parent causes many otherwise sensible men and women to put impossible demands on themselves, to have expectations that are anything but realistic. Parents will do better in the long run if they stop to evaluate these expectations and clearly define what they really want to accomplish. No one can be and do everything for their children, nor should they try. Letting go of impossible goals can help parents feel better about themselves and the job they are doing.

If trying to have more reasonable expectations isn't immediately successful, parents should take time to look at who or what is making them feel guilty. Perhaps it's the message that "this is not the way it was when we were kids." Or maybe it is societal pressures to "do it all." Try to be strong and listen to your intuition about what is best for you and your children.

Remember that fumbling doesn't mean failing. Everyone makes mistakes. Forgiving yourself benefits not only you, but your children, who will model your behavior. They will learn that mistakes are not the end of the world, but opportunities to learn. Try to remember that you can choose to concentrate on celebrating the things you do well, rather than wallowing in the temporary blips that make you feel like you've failed.

Another thing that can help parents be easier on themselves is realizing that children are separate individuals whose behavior does not reflect on the parents' dignity and value as people. Sure, you'd like to take credit when your kids behave wonderfully, but that would also mean taking the blame when they don't. A better way is to realize that parents have influence over their children, but not control. Being aware of this boundary can make it easier to correct them without blaming them or ourselves.

Marston also says, "*Remember, the degree to which you love and value yourself is the degree to which you can love and value others.*" Thus, if you have trouble convincing yourself that it's acceptable and even desirable to "take care of yourself," remember that your children are watching you. Modeling healthy self-esteem is one of your main jobs as a parent, and critical to your children's acquisition of the same healthy self-esteem.

In summary, taking care of one's own health and emotional well-being is an important element of being a loving and responsible parent. It's not a luxury to nurture your non-parent self, because it is your health and happiness that enable you to take care of your children, and give them a sense of security. The benefits of healthy self-esteem in parents therefore extend to their children.

Resources:

The Magic of Encouragement by Stephanie Marston.

Balancing Work and Family. Work and Family Institute.

Positive Discipline from A – Z by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott & Stephen Glenn.

"Kissing Mommy Guilt Good-bye" by Paula Spencer. *Parenting*, September 1997.

Discussion Questions Reasonable Expectations for Parents

1. How has your self-image changed since becoming a parent?
2. What do you feel you do well as a parent?
3. What do you really want to accomplish as a parent? How might guilt get in the way?
4. How do you nurture your non-parent self?
5. Give an example of an expectation you have of yourself, or that someone in your family has of you that you would like to change.
6. Discuss your experiences with the difference between control and influence over your children.

At-Home Page Reasonable Expectations for Parents

Children need our love and understanding. Parents also need to love and understand themselves. Perhaps the following words, adapted from Ann Lovrien of St. Paul ECFE, can help.

1. I am learning along with my child. We are both growing. I need nurturing, patience and forgiveness, as does my child.
2. Living means making mistakes. I am going to make mistakes as a parent. Mistakes can be corrected – that is how I will learn.
3. The one constant in my life is change. I will continually be challenged to learn new things. There is no moment when I will be able to say, “Finally, I’ve made it.” But I can say, “I’ve made it this far.”
4. I’m doing the best I can with what I know and where I’m at now. I will remain open to new ideas that can help me to do even better.
5. I cannot control how my children will “turn out.” In spite of their choices, I can see myself as a good person.

Suggested Reading:

Celebrate Yourself by Dorothy Briggs.

Your Child's Self-Esteem by Dorothy Briggs.

Meditations for Mothers of Toddlers by Beth Wilson Saavedra.

Grow Deep Not Just Tall by Karen Kaiser Clarke.

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser.

Using the Language of Encouragement

This topic falls under the domain of **Parent-Child Relationship** and the emphasis is **Relationship Skills: Sensitivity and Responsiveness**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Understand how their choice of words influences children's perceptions and behaviors.
- Use the language of encouragement to influence children to move in positive directions.

Praise and encouragement are not the same. Parents use praise because they want their children to feel good about themselves and because they want to reinforce positive behavior. Yet praise can be seen as a type of reward used to manipulate children. Praise tells a child, "If you do something that I (the parent) value, you will have the reward of being recognized and valued by me." Children naturally resent being controlled, and praise can actually work against a parent's intention, because it interferes with a child's developing sense of autonomy.

Praise, like punishment, can be viewed as a type of external control. When parents are in charge of handing out punishments, children fail to learn self-control. In the same way, when parents are in charge of handing out praise, children fail to internalize a sense of self-worth. Praise creates "other" esteem instead of self-esteem. Praise encourages an attitude of "What's in it for me?" Also, because praise is a form of judgment, it creates anxiety and can be discouraging or threatening; although its intent is to build self-esteem, praise may have the opposite effect.

Some other drawbacks of praise are that it:

- Teaches children to compare themselves to others.
- Teaches dependence on the opinions of others (praise "junkies" or "people pleasers").
- May cause children to play it safe. (*"If I try and fail, I won't get the 'reward' of praise."*)
- Discourages persistence, creativity, and learning; motivates only to seek more praise.
- Reduces a child's pleasure in his or her own accomplishments; frequently focuses on what the parent values, not what is important to the child.
- Creates a barrier to a healthy relationship, as no one likes to be judged.
- Is vague and nonspecific; praise doesn't tell a child what was good so he can repeat it.

Encouragement is different, however. Encouragement focuses on:

- Acknowledgement and appreciation, not judgment. This tells the child you noticed, and lets *him* take pride. Some phrases you might use are: or “I see a clean floor; you picked up all your toys” or “It really was a help to me when you put away your toys.”
- The child and her thoughts, feelings, and pleasure in achieving. Some things you might say are: “You look like you enjoyed that” or “How did it feel to do that?”
- Effort and improvement, not completion or perfection. You might say, “You’re really working hard on that” or “I see your bike isn’t tipping over nearly as much as yesterday.”
- What they do, not who they are. This shows unconditional love by acknowledging positive behavior without judgment of their character. In other words, a child can misbehave and still be loved. This also can help children see the effects of their actions on others. Saying “You’re always so generous” means less to a child (who can probably think of many times when he *wasn’t* generous) than being told, “You had 12 stickers and you gave 11 away. Look how happy your friends are.”
- Helping a child self-evaluate. This teaches a child that his opinion is important and helps a child become responsible and self-motivated. Some phrases might be “How do you like your drawing?” or “What do you think about that story?”
- Asking about a child’s inner experiences, enriching your relationship by showing interest and caring. You might ask: “How did it feel when you jumped into the deep water for the first time?”

Ultimately, encouragement is not so much about memorizing a new script, but of keeping in mind your long-term goals for children, examining your motives, and watching for the effects of what you say. Spontaneous, genuine expressions of delight are always appropriate when your enthusiasm is honest and not an attempt to manipulate the child’s future behavior. Parents may want to look inward to examine whether their reactions are helping their child feel a sense of control over her life – or teaching her to look to them for approval. Are parents saying things to help the child become more excited about what he’s doing in its own right – or turning the activity into something he just wants to get through in order to receive a pat on the head?

Parents may want to remember that the primary reason children respond so warmly to encouragement is because it requires the adults to pay close attention to what the child is doing and how he might be feeling about it. This goes a long way toward fulfilling the child’s most basic human needs – to feel capable and to feel loved.

Resources:

“Rewards and Praise: The Poisoned Carrot” by Robin Grille. www.naturalchild.com
“When to Praise” by Nancy Samalin and Katherine Whitney. *Parents*, December 1997.
“Five Reasons to Stop Saying ‘Good Job’” by Alfie Kohn. *Young Children*, September 2001.
“Rephrase the Praise” by Katy Abel and Carleton Kendrick. www.familyeducation.com
“Praise versus Encouragement” by Duen Hsi Yen.
www.noogenesis.com/malama/encouragement.html
Positive Discipline books by Jane Nelsen.

Discussion Questions Using the Language of Encouragement

1. What do you understand as the difference between praise and encouragement?

2. What are the advantages of using encouragement instead of praise?

3. How can using the language of encouragement help your child become the person you hope he will be?

4. For many parents, sorting out the difference between praise and encouragement is difficult. To get some practice, create a response that is encouraging and one that is praising for each of the situations listed below. (Notice how difficult it is to praise anything other than success!)

Situation	Encouraging Statement	Praising Statement
Your child spilled his milk and spread it around more while trying to wipe it up himself.		
You've had a reasonably pleasant grocery shopping trip with your child.		
Your daughter dressed herself and has her dress on backwards.		
Your child is frustrated because he can't fit <i>all</i> the shapes into the shape sorter.		
Your child came to the table for dinner right away when you called.		
Your child helped pick up the toys.		

At-Home Page Using the Language of Encouragement

You may want to show this chart to the other people in your child's life. It explains the differences between praise and encouragement in a condensed way.

Differences Between Praise and Encouragement		
	<i>Praise</i>	<i>Encouragement</i>
<i>Dictionary definition:</i>	(1) to express a favorable judgment of (2) to glorify, especially by attribution of perfection (3) an expression of approval	(1) to inspire with courage (2) to spur on, stimulate (3) to give hope or support
<i>Addresses:</i>	The doer: "Good boy."	The deed: "You put your cup in the trash."
<i>Recognizes:</i>	Only complete, perfect product: "You did it right."	Effort and improvement: "You worked hard on that."
<i>Attitude:</i>	Patronizing, manipulative: "I like the way Suzie is sitting."	Respectful, appreciative: "Thank you for sitting down quickly. Now we can get started."
<i>Used most often with:</i>	Children: "You're such a good little girl."	Adults: "Thanks for helping."
<i>Examples:</i>	"I'm proud of you for pooping in the potty." (Deprives person of ownership of own achievement.)	"You did it! You pooped in the potty." (Recognizes ownership and responsibility for achievement.)
<i>Invites:</i>	People to change for others	People to change for themselves
<i>Focus of control:</i>	External: Child says: "Was that good?" (Approval junkies.)	Internal: Child thinks: "I am happy with what I did." (Self-evaluators.)
<i>Teaches:</i>	What to think	How to think
<i>Goal:</i>	Conformity: "You did it right."	Understanding: "How do you feel about what you did?" or "Tell me how you did that."
<i>Effect on self-esteem:</i>	Feels worthwhile only when others approve	Feels worthwhile without outside approval
<i>Long-range effect:</i>	Dependence on others	Self-confidence, self-reliance

Cut out this chart and put it on your fridge to help you remember what you've learned today.

ENCOURAGEMENT REMINDERS

Say nothing.
Report what you see and leave out the adjectives.
Focus on effort and improvement.
Emphasize the impact on others.
Say "thank you" for cooperation and contributions.
Ask questions (about how they feel or how they did something).
Avoid comparisons.

FIVE COMMENTS TO USE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

You did that all by yourself.
You're really working hard on that.
Thanks! It really is a help to me when you
You look really proud of yourself.
I believe in you.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen, Ed.D.
Children: The Challenge by Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D.
Punished by Rewards by Alfie Kohn.
The Magic of Encouragement by Stephanie Marston.

Suggested Books for Children:

Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown.
It's Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr.
Who Do You Love? By Martin Waddell.

Helping Children Sleep

This topic falls under the domain of **Early Childhood Development** and the emphasis is **Physical and Motor Development: Physical Health and Well-being**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Recognize that children can learn good sleep habits.
- Understand the impact developmental and temperamental issues have at bedtime.
- Develop strategies for creating an environment conducive to sleep.

A good night's sleep is essential to the health and mental outlook of toddlers and parents alike. For toddlers, this probably means between 12 and 14 hours a day, including nap. The good news is that sleep habits can be learned; children can learn to fall asleep on their own. They can learn that sleep should happen mostly at night and they can learn that they will feel cranky if they don't get enough rest.

From a health standpoint, it's important to remember that growth hormone is secreted during sleep. Sleep helps develop tissues and muscle. Good sleep makes kids more alert, cheerful, and less prone to accidents. It also vastly improves the mood of parents.

Three factors combine to determine a child's sleep pattern:

1. Development (both social-emotional and neurological). Although parents can't change where a child is at developmentally, they can understand how developmental issues impact sleep habits. The most important of these issues is a toddler's push toward autonomy and desire for control, which strangely enough coexists with a reluctance to separate from the parents. This conflict may result in one or both of the following scenarios: the child refuses to go to bed and/or the child refuses to separate from the parent. Another developmental issue is the child's developing awareness of feelings, increasing imagination, and better memory. These factors may combine to overwhelm a young child and can also lead to fears.

"Development" can also be a parent's friend at bedtime, however. Toddlers love ritual, routine, and familiarity, so the usefulness of a bedtime ritual that caters to a child's love of routine can't be overstated. Good sleep and bedtime routines are known to help a child prepare for sleep physically, not just psychologically. Bedtime routines should be friendly, relaxed, calm, as pleasant as possible, and the same every night, seven nights a week. Shape the routine so one thing leads to the next. Let your child handle washing and dressing as much as possible. Remember, bedtime rituals aren't successful solely

because toddlers thrive on the security of routine. They also work because kids come to associate bedtime with something pleasant (the routine).

2. Temperament. Of course, parents can't change a child's temperament, but they can understand how a child's bedtime habits are consistent with all of his or her behavior. For instance, intense children need help learning ways to help themselves calm down. Parents should try hard to get such a child to bed before he is overtired. Sensitive children may need time to talk about their feelings, "white noise" from an aquarium or fan, an uncluttered and darkened room, or comfortable clothes and bedding. Slow-to-adapt children, more than any others, need warning that bedtime is approaching and a predictable, consistent, nightly routine. It's helpful to limit the number of transitions, perhaps by combining elements or doing everything in one room. Energetic children need time to wiggle and parents who have already put loud, enticing toys away.

3. Environment. This is a factor over which parents *do* have control, and they should make sure the child's bedroom is a pleasant place, not associated with punishment. It should be cozy, inviting, with a comfortable temperature and appropriate lighting. Many environmental factors that are within a parent's control promote good sleep. These include: regular bedtimes seven days a week; daily exercise; setting the body's clock by exposure to morning light; regular mealtimes; naps immediately following lunch; limited screen time (no more than 60 minutes a day); avoiding caffeine, and awareness of the cues that your child is ready for sleep, but not yet overtired.

There is a range of roles that parents play in getting their children to sleep. In most families, this means a gradual shift between parents easing children into sleep and children learning to do it on their own, sometime during the first five years of life. What is most important for your family's success is to do what is comfortable for you and what works for your child. Realize that one method probably won't "work" for the entire five years.

Resources:

Winning Bedtime Battles by Charles Schaefer, Ph.D.

Sleepless in America: Is Your Child Misbehaving or Missing Sleep? by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka.

The No-Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers and Preschoolers by Elizabeth Pantley.
Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser.

Discussion Questions Helping Children Sleep

1. What challenges have you had with your child at bedtime and how have you handled them?
2. What bedtime rituals and routines have you and your child developed? What effect have they had on your child's sleep habits?
3. What role do you believe adults should play in helping children sleep? How do you envision this changing over the years?
4. What successes have you had at bedtime with your child?
5. If you and your partner have different viewpoints about children and sleep, how have you dealt with them? How have you responded to outside pressures regarding your children sleeping a certain way?

At-Home Page Helping Children Sleep

While a bedtime routine can be very helpful, there are additional things parents can do. Many children like the bedroom door left open and a night light on. Comfort objects such as a special blanket or stuffed animal may also help ease them into sleep and will be there in the morning before you arrive.

The atmosphere at bedtime is also important in helping children relax for the night. Some ideas for parents to consider are:

- Require low-key activities (for at least one hour) before bedtime. Watch for the “window,” the time your child shows he is ready for sleep by rubbing his eyes, laying down, cuddling, or yawning. Get him to bed before he is overtired, when you are more likely to see a frenzy of activity, whining, silliness, jumping, screaming, and requests for more food, as the body is getting signals that urge it to keep going.
- Establish a regular time for going to bed, but be flexible if circumstances warrant it once the routine is established.
- Bath time and story time are usually very calming before bedtime. Choose relaxing, comforting stories, rather than those that are more actively stimulating.
- Encourage children to share a happy experience from the day. This can help create closure.
- Encourage children to think of something pleasant that they will enjoy doing tomorrow.
- Treat your child with respect and always remember his or her level of emotional development when deciding what to do.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Good Night, Sleep Tight by Kim West with Joanne Kenen.

Helping Your Child Sleep Through the Night by Joanne Cuthbertson and Susie Schevill.

Suggested Books for Children:

Noise in the Night by Anne Alexander.

Goodnight Horsey by Frank Asch.

Switch on the Night by Ray Bradbury.

A Child's Goodnight Book by Margaret Wise Brown.

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown.

The Sleepy Little Lion by Margaret Wise Brown.

The Bedtime Story by Jim Erskine.

Ten Bears in My Bed by Stanley Mack.

Good Night, Good Morning by Helen Oxenbury.

Can't You Sleep Little Bear? by Martin Waddell.

Maisy's Bedtime by Lucy Cousins.

Papa's Song by Kate McMullan.

Froggy Goes to Bed by Jonathan London.

Vroomaloom Zoom by John Coy.

The Quilt by Ann Jonas.

Young Children and Sharing

This topic falls under the domain of **Early Childhood Development** and the emphasis is **Social and Emotional Development: Social Competence and Relationships**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Foster their children's friendships with children and adults.
- Recognize that willingness to share develops as a child matures.
- Develop strategies to encourage sharing.

Many parents worry when their young children have trouble sharing. But sharing, whether it's a parent's attention or a favorite toy, is hard for most children. Certainly, children at this age are not being selfish; they are really only being self-centered, which is their normal, expected developmental stage. They are just beginning the long journey that will lead them to be able to share.

The **first step** on the journey is learning about ownership. This is the stage when the child believes "everything is mine." Allowing your child to experience true ownership means some things should belong *only* to the child; the family should not touch them or take them without asking. Once children feel that there are certain things they can hold on to, they may be more willing to give up some of their toys and possessions.

However, toddlers who have just mastered the concept of ownership may see little reason to give up anything. They do not yet understand that something they give away may be returned to them. In fact, adults add to the confusion by using the word "sharing" when they really mean "giving." Cookies that are "shared" are gone forever, while a toy that is shared can be returned. Young children first think of sharing as giving away what's in their hands; this doesn't make much sense to them. One useful trick to use with toddlers is to talk about "taking turns" rather than sharing. This is much easier for young children to understand, especially when parents remember that a toddler's current understanding of the concept of time makes him unsure of when, or if, he will get an object back.

The **next step** toward sharing comes when the child is allowed to decide whether to let a friend use his toy. Parents need to resist the urge to step in and give the toy to the friend. This only teaches the child that nothing is actually his and that his parents can take anything back. When parents push their child to share before he is developmentally ready, they are teaching him not to share, but to comply with authority.

As your child's language develops, you can help her find the words to ask for what she wants instead of grabbing. You can also help her learn to say, "*No, I don't want to*

share yet — maybe later” when someone asks her to share. Parents can be comforted by the fact that the child who feels in control will share when ready.

Sharing is a form of cooperation that can be taught, modeled, and encouraged by parents. Here are some things for parents to try:

- A child who feels more secure and loved may be more willing to share toys, so continue to give a lot of loving attention.
- Recognize *any* small signs of the beginning of sharing you observe with words of encouragement. Children enjoy attention and describing what they did and how it made the other person feel will help them to continue that behavior.
- Be sure you are modeling gracious sharing behavior for your child. Talk about some of the things you share, such as tools, recipes, car pool rides, and your time. *“Mrs. Brown liked it when we let her use our ladder.”* Let your children observe you sharing with others.
- Talk about how good it makes one feel to share willingly with others.

Try to have patience with your child and the long process of learning to share. Don’t rush or push. The process will take years, not months. Eventually, your child will mature enough to share willingly and to enjoy the fun of playing with things together. He will have completed the long journey from “mine” to “ours.”

Resources:

Discipline Without Spanking or Spoiling by Jerry Wyckoff, Ph.D., and Barbara C. Unell.

“On Teaching Kids About Sharing” by Fred Rogers. *Ready 2 Learn*, January-February-March 1997, p. 4.

“Helping a Child Learn to Share” by Dr. Lawrence Kutner.

www.drkutner.com/parenting/articles/share.html

Discussion Questions

Young Children and Sharing

Because children learn so much from watching their parents, it may be helpful for parents to examine their own beliefs and practices regarding sharing.

Think about the answers to the following questions.

	All the time	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Do you feel you have to share in every situation?				
After having shared something, do you wish you had not?				
When someone asks you to share something you don't want to share, do you do it anyway?				
When someone asks you to share and you don't want to, do you say, "No" comfortably?				
Do you have certain places in the house that you consider "yours?" (e.g., chair, side of the bed, place at the table)				
Do you feel infringed upon if someone takes your place without asking?				

1. Where is your child on the journey toward sharing?

2. What are some ways you have handled difficult sharing situations with your child?

3. Discuss this quote from the curriculum: *"When parents push their child to share before he is developmentally ready, they are teaching him not to share, but to comply with authority."*

At-Home Page Young Children and Sharing

Learning to share takes time. Parents can help the process by:

- Keeping their sense of humor and remaining patient with the process.
- Allowing a child to truly “possess” an object first and then give it up on her own terms. Allow your child to put truly special things away before a playdate. Tell your child, “Fatima wants a turn when you are through.” Then give your child enough time to really enjoy the item.
- Establishing rules for sharing. *“When you put a toy down, anyone may play with it. If it’s in your hands, you may keep it.”*
- Setting up “easy” sharing situations, for instance, by giving each child a piece of paper and setting a basket of crayons between them. This is a way to build early success with a shared experience. Meeting at a park or other “neutral territory” can make it easier for both children to share.
- Using a timer for taking turns.
- Playing sharing games with their toddler. Have the child give you a toy while you thank her for sharing. After a few seconds, give the toy back to the child. In the beginning, it’s a good idea to keep the toy in sight the entire time. This helps the child build confidence that something shared is not gone forever.
- Teaching their child to make a trade for something he wants. This works especially well with younger siblings.
- Commenting about sharing after a friend has been over. *“It made your friend feel happy when you shared and took turns with her.”*

Certain playthings make sharing easier. You may want to offer crayons or markers, blocks, strips of construction paper for paper chains, or play dough when your child is with a friend. Also, consider encouraging activities that give children practice taking turns, like see-saw, rolling a ball back and forth, or adding ingredients to a recipe you are making.

Toddler Property Laws

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks like mine, it's mine.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis & Janis Keyser.

Suggested Books for Children:

Come Play With Us by Anne Sibley O'Brien.

I Want That by Anne Sibley O'Brien.

I Can't Wait (A Children's Problem Solving Book) by Elizabeth Crary.

Little Bunny's Cool Tool Set by Maribeth Boelts.

What Mary Jo Shared by Janice May Udry.

Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick by Kevin Henkes.

The Language Explosion

This topic falls under the domain of **Early Childhood Development** and the emphasis is **Language and Literacy Development: Listening and Speaking**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Engage children in conversation and notice and respond to what children say and do.
- Allow time for children to communicate verbally and non-verbally.
- Use language in everyday activities with children and talk about their actions and ideas.

Most parents eagerly await their children's first words. Children often understand many words (this is called receptive language) by the age of one year, but they may say only a few words (expressive language) before the age of two years. It's important for parents to remember that like most other developmental skills, the acquisition of language takes place at different rates for different children. There is a wide range of "normal" for various linguistic milestones.

Sometime between the ages of 18 months and three years, however, most children will have a "language explosion." At this time, it's amazing to note that children can acquire a new word every 90 minutes! During this explosion, a child's vocabulary increases from about 50 words to between 1,000 and 2,000. It seems that children begin to "crack the code" of language now, realizing that words represent things that aren't present. They are figuring out what they want, what words represent it, and who to ask. Between 24 and 30 months, most children also seem to have a basic sense of their language's grammar, usually placing pronouns, nouns, and verbs in the correct order.

Children learn language best by being spoken to often and by being **given a lot of opportunities to answer**. It takes patience to wait for a toddler to form a response sometimes, but it's important to give her a chance to do so. When you wait a few seconds before responding to your toddler's needs, it will encourage her to communicate. Also, many times, the words adults use are strictly functional, so that directives like "Eat your dinner" and "Say, 'thank you'" are all the language toddlers hear. It is important to remember that the development of language skills requires connection, attention, and the interaction of real conversation. Children don't learn language by watching a screen, although they may "learn" songs and letters and numbers.

Many studies have found a strong relationship between how much parents talk with their babies and how quickly children acquire language. There are a number of more specific things parents can do to promote language development in their children. Some of these are:

Respond to children's communication. The period when children switch from using gestures and sounds to using words can be frustrating for parents. Even if you don't always understand what your child is saying, it is significant to her that you are listening

and paying attention. Saying, “Tell me again” or “Show me what you mean” shows your child you’re trying to understand.

Narrate the day. Talk aloud about what you’re doing and ask your toddler questions. You may feel silly because your child can’t answer back, but just hearing you talk helps your child’s ear become accustomed to the rhythms and sounds of the language so that he can duplicate them when the time is right. Talking to children about what you see them doing is also a good idea, as it gives them words for their own experiences.

Expand and improve on what your child says. If your child mispronounces a word (“ba-ba” for bottle, for instance), don’t correct him or point out the mistake. Instead, use the correct pronunciation when you reply (“Yes, here’s your bottle.”). You can also elaborate on what he said by adding a word or idea (for instance, “That is a big bottle), which not only increases vocabulary but also teaches word combinations.

Speak naturally. Don’t overly enunciate or speak in one- or two-word sound-bites. Speaking in regular sentences helps your child understand how to put words together into meaningful phrases. This constant exposure to language is the key to enhancing speech development.

Give ‘em a break. This may seem paradoxical when language is the goal, but down time allows a child to take a break from the stimulation and stress of learning and also allows learning to consolidate. A child’s day should include time for quiet play and time away from constant conversation and verbal interaction.

Create a language-rich environment. Read to your child daily and talk about what you read. Singing, telling stories, and making up silly rhymes give children plenty of chances to develop a love of language and proficiency with the spoken word.

As toddler’s language develops, they are able to communicate both physical and emotional needs to their parents. This ability can deepen the relationship between parent and child, by providing parents with both insight and ideas on how to help, and by giving children a way to become active participants in their own lives. This deeper relationship, with its caring and attention, helps toddlers feel worthwhile and loved, a wonderful bonus added to their growing ability to communicate.

Resources:

“**Hey, Can We Talk?**” by Sandra Gordon. *Parents*, April 2004.

“**Toddler Talk**” by Hope Edelman. *Child*, September 2000.

Me, Myself and I: How Children Build Their Sense of Self by Kyle D. Pruett, M.D.

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser.

“**The Baby Human: Geniuses in Diapers**” Discovery Health Channel video.

Positive Discipline: The First Three Years by Jane Nelsen, Ed.D. Cheryl Erwin, and Roslyn Ann Duffy.

The Language Explosion Discussion Questions

1. Where is your child along the journey of language development?
2. How does your child's language affect your daily routines and your relationship?
3. What language promoting activities do you and your child especially enjoy?
4. What changes would you like to make to further encourage your child's language development?
5. What questions or concerns do you have about your child's language development?

The Language Explosion At-Home Page

Many parents worry about the timing of their children's language development. It may help to remember that children may talk late for a number of reasons – and not all of them have serious consequences.

Here are some possible explanations for speech delays:

Gender. Generally, boys talk later than girls.

Genetics. Toddlers who are late talkers very often have a family member who also talked late.

Hearing loss. Fluid in the ears or chronic ear infections can affect a child's ability to perceive sound and understand speech.

Developmental delay or disorders. Premature children, especially, may need time to "catch up." It's also possible for a child to have a disorder in which the oral-facial muscles cannot form words correctly. Cerebral palsy or autism can also cause speech delays. Most stuttering, stammering, and sound reversal, however, is completely normal.

Bilingual households. Children raised with more than one language may take up to an extra year before they start speaking, as they struggle with the sounds and vocabulary of two tongues. Typically, however, they will speak both language fluently when they finally do start talking.

Negativism. Toddlers can show their independence by refusing to talk, especially when they know their parents want them to. Step back a little to give your child room to work with words on his own terms. Also, over-attentive parents may make it less necessary for a child to speak, so don't rush in to answer for your child or attend to her needs too quickly.

Always check with your child's doctor if you have concerns about *any* aspect of your child's development. Be persistent if your instincts tell you that further evaluation is necessary.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Look Who's Talking by Laura Dyer.

Suggested Books for Children:

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Eric Carle.

Dinosaur Roar by Paul and Henrietta Stickland.

Jamberry by Bruce Degan.

Hop on Pop by Dr. Seuss.

Temper Tantrums

This topic falls under the domain of **Early Childhood Development** and the emphasis is **Social and Emotional Development: Emotional Development**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Help them identify and understand their emotions.
- Model, teach, and positively reinforce their methods of constructively coping with frustration and conflict.
- Develop strategies to understand and cope with tantrums.

Sometime during the second year of life, many children will display the "fireworks" known as temper tantrums. Although no parent enjoys seeing their child upset, it can help to remember that the child is experiencing an age appropriate response to frustration or anger. Growing up is hard work, and children may be frustrated by their own limitations of size, strength, or ability.

Each child is an individual, of course, and her actions and reactions, including the way she has a tantrum, are unique. Behavior during a tantrum can range from a whimper to a bang. If your child is one whose tantrums are among the noisiest and most obvious, try to remember that "this, too, shall pass." As the child's self-control and ability to communicate increase, he will have new tools to prevent the frustration that causes tantrums now.

Although tantrums seem sudden and unpredictable, if parents look closely they will probably notice that many occur when their child is overwhelmed by frustration or stimulation. This opens the door to many possibilities for prevention:

1. Tantrums may result when children become too tired, hungry, bored, or overexcited. Regular routines for meals, naps, bedtime, and cleanup can go a long way in preventing tantrums. Noticing what usually happens just before a tantrum can help you become more aware of signs your child has reached his limit.
2. Structure the environment for success. Toys that are age appropriate, buckets for storing children's toys, and low hooks rather than hangers for jackets can help the child feel successful, not stressed.

3. Give your child plenty of chances to make decisions. Control frustration by offering a few choices. Too many choices which are as overwhelming to a child as too few (or none) are frustrating. Here's a great illustration: "You're having cereal for breakfast" is too controlling; "What do you want for breakfast?" is so open-ended it's overwhelming. A better way to give a choice to a toddler is to ask, "Do you want pancakes or toast for breakfast?" Avoid questions that can be answered "no." Try to give two alternatives with every "no" you must use ("You can't have a popsicle, but you may have an apple or a banana.").
4. Allow transition time before changing an activity or leaving the house. Give your child more than one chance to get it done or get it right. If you see your child's frustration building, silently help out "just enough" for her to succeed, but don't take over. In general, try to reduce the demands on the child.

If a tantrum occurs in spite of these things, what can parents do? Here are some suggestions:

- Try and stay calm. The child may become frightened if you lose control, too.
- Resist the urge to try to stop the tantrum, threaten punishment, reason with or argue with the child or show anger yourself.
- Stay near or with your child; hold her if you feel that will be helpful. Understand that your child may be frightened by being out of control and doesn't know how to get control back.
- Talk in a soft, calm voice. You might try saying something like, "Your feelings are okay with me. You'll feel better soon. I'm here to help."

As children get older, they may tantrum as a result of not getting their way. This type of manipulative tantrum requires a different response from parents:

- Don't give in unless your original denial was unfair. If you decide that *you* are being the unreasonable one, explain to your child that you have thought about it and have decided to change your mind.
- Model healthy ways to handle frustration and anger. Never let your behavior teach your child how to have a tantrum. Remember, your child needs your help in **learning** mature ways of behaving. Help him know that his feelings are normal and acceptable and give him words to label them. In this way, you can help him gain control of himself.
- Ignore the tantrum, but not the child or his feelings. Acknowledge what the child wants as well as her frustration and anger at being denied. Remain firm about your decision, in a kind way.

If your child has a tantrum in front of others who may be judging you, handling it may seem harder. Try to think about priorities. Don't give in just because you think others are watching. Regardless of your "audience," use the same basic techniques outlined above. Move the child to a quiet spot, speak softly, and leave if you absolutely must. When either type of tantrum ends, don't scold or punish. Remember, your child has behaved normally, not badly. Let him/her know you still love him/her.

Resources:

"Meltdown! When Kids Lose It, Parents Need to Stay Cool and Calm" by Nancy Samalin and Patricia McCormick. *Parents*, January 1993.

Your Toddler by Richard R. Rubin, Ph.D., John J. Fisher III and Susan G. Doering, Ph.D.

1, 2, 3 . . . The Toddler Years by Irene van der Zande.

Tantrums: Triggers and Treatments by Martha Bullock. Family Information Services Professional Resource Materials.

Raising Your Spirited Child by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka.

Discussion Questions Temper Tantrums

1. What triggers tantrums for your child?
2. How do you manage your own feelings when your child has a tantrum?
3. What preventive measures have you found helpful?
4. How can you prepare your child for a trip to the store in order to prevent tantrums?
5. How have you handled public temper tantrums? What worked?
6. How do you show your love when your child's tantrum has ended?

At-Home Page Temper Tantrums

Keep a log of your child's tantrums to look for triggers and find a pattern.

When your child has a tantrum, he might be trying to say:

- I am tired (hungry, stressed-out, etc.).
- I know what I want, but I don't know how to explain it.
- I want my blankie or pacifier so bad.
- I can't take these bright lights and this noise anymore.
- I am so frustrated I can't stand it.
- I feel crowded. I need space.
- I'm scared. I need you to hold and comfort me.

He is *not* trying to say:

- I'm out to get my parents.
- I want to punish my mom for . . .
- What can I do to drive Mom crazy today? I think I'll lose it in the grocery store.

Make a list of techniques you can try the next time your child has a tantrum. See how well each works.

- Acknowledge the child's feelings.
- Use humor.
- Distract the child.
- Hold your child; speak softly.
- Ignore the tantrum, not the child.

Consider ways to keep yourself calm the next time your child has a tantrum. Some possibilities:

- Give yourself a time out, sitting away from the storm in the bathroom or bedroom.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Do some deep, slow breathing or count to 10 s-l-o-w-l-y.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Your Toddler by Richard Rubin, Ph.D., John J. Fisher III and Susan G. Doering, Ph.D.

Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development by T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.

Suggested Books for Children:

Sometimes I'm Bombaloo by Rachel Vail.

The Chocolate Covered Cookie Tantrum by Deborah Blumenthal.

Three Star Billy by Pat Hutchins.

Baby Rattlesnake by Te Ata.

Setting Loving Limits for Young Children

This topic falls under the domain of **Parent-Child Relationship** and the emphasis is **Guidance: Discipline**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Establish and maintain reasonable limits.
- Provide children with developmentally appropriate opportunities to learn responsibility.
- Identify guidelines for setting effective limits.

“Setting limits is part of loving.” – Fred Rogers

One of the best ways to show your child how much you care is by providing the safety and security of limits. As your child grows and her world expands, she wants to try many new things. Yet she needs to know there are boundaries to keep her safe and that her parents will help her control her behavior when she can't. In this way, the child begins to learn self-control.

Here are some tools to help you set appropriate limits:

- **Limit your limits.** Before you set a limit, ask yourself if it is really important. Too many rules may be overwhelming to your child and hard to remember. One way to keep the list short is to ask yourself if the behavior is life-threatening or morally threatening, suggests Barbara Coloroso.
- **Set reasonable limits.** Is your child actually developmentally able to do what you expect? Set limits so your child can succeed. Adjust the limits to suit your child's age, personality, and temperament.
- **Be clear and positive.** State your limits simply. Use a calm, matter-of-fact voice with respectful words. Parents should state limits in a positive way, telling the child what to do (instead of what not to do). Be sure your child can “picture” what you want him to do.
- **Be consistent in applying and enforcing limits.** Children are more likely to respect limits when they know their parents mean what they say. Consistent limits are dependable and help the child feel secure.

Most toddlers will test limits. They test to discover how decisions get made, which ones they get to make, and to figure out “who’s the boss?” They test repeatedly to verify their results and because they are compelled developmentally to do so. Toddlers test the things most familiar to them—and do their testing with the people closest to them. Testing is not about defiance, but a way for toddlers to establish their separateness. One way they do this is to say “no” and not do what is asked; another way is to do what is *not* wanted. Some will be more persistent in this than others. This is also normal. Even though it’s hard for parents, try to keep in mind that persistence is a worthwhile adult trait. Try to cultivate an attitude of acceptance by reminding yourself that testing is an important – and inevitable—part of growth and development. Let the message of love get through even when your child has pushed you to your limit!

Even though consistency in limit enforcing is an important goal, parents need to have realistic expectations for themselves. If there are times when you aren't consistent, be gentle with yourself and remember that tomorrow is another day! Your child will give you many more chances to hold the line.

Resources:

Positive Parenting Minnesota Extension Service.

Love and Limits: Parenting with Good Sense Minnesota Extension Service.

Love and Limits: Guidance Tools for Creative Parenting by Elizabeth Crary.

"Set Rules According to Child's Abilities" by Lawrence Kutner. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 7, 1993.

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser.

Discussion Questions

Setting Loving Limits for Young Children

1. What are some reasonable limits for a two-year-old?
2. Which limits are easy for you to enforce with your child? Which are difficult? Why?
3. Many parents find it easier to make negative rules than positive ones. Some parents may not be specific enough when setting limits. It takes practice to state your limits in such a way that they help your child know what to do. You can practice by changing these "rules" to be clearer and more positive:
 - *"Don't splash!"* (when child is in tub)
 - *"Be careful."* (when child is carrying cup of milk)
 - *"No hitting!"*
 - *"Don't pull the dog's tail!"*
 - *"Be good."* (on shopping trip)
4. Discuss the concept of "picking your battles" when it comes to setting limits for your toddler.
5. Discuss your struggles with consistently enforcing your limits for your child.
6. How do you let the message of love get through to your child when you set limits?

At-Home Page

Setting Loving Limits for Young Children

When parents set limits for the right reasons, the boundaries help protect and guide their child so that she stays safe and picks up the fundamentals of how to get along in life. To determine which “battles to pick,” ask yourself these four questions:

Will my rules keep my child from getting hurt?

Safety-based boundaries keep him secure by making sure he doesn't harm himself or others. Some examples might be “Hold my hand in the parking lot”; “pet the dog gently”; or “sit in your car seat”.

Will my limits teach my child right from wrong?

Certain rules help a child develop moral values and personal integrity, although these things are not to be expected in toddlers. You can teach these rules best by example, so remember you are always a role model for your child. Rather than instructing your child to “tell the truth,” for example, show her what that means by always being honest with her.

Will my rules make my child easier to get along with?

Show your child what it means to respect the feelings and rights of others. This will ultimately help him grow into an adult who is well-adjusted and knows how to get along with others. Don't expect sharing or politeness from a toddler, however.

Will these boundaries give my child a sense of responsibility?

Toddlers are eager to take charge of their own lives. Let them have control where it is appropriate, remembering that your goal is to help them feel capable, not to have them perform a task perfectly.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Positive Discipline: The First Three Years by Jane Nelsen.

Love and Limits: Guidance Tools for Creative Parenting by Elizabeth Crary.

Suggested Books for Children:

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie by Laura Joffe Numeroff.

No, David! by David Shannon.

Learning through Play

This topic falls under the domain of **Early Childhood Development** and the emphasis is **Approaches to Learning: Curiosity**.

Parents support their children's development when they:

- Understand the interaction between development and play.
- Recognize their importance to their child's play and identify appropriate ways to engage in their child's play.
- Encourage their child's development through their choice of toys.

Play is the work of children and one of the main ways they learn. Learning comes best when we give children space, materials, and time. As Fred Rogers said, "Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning. They have to play with what they know to be true in order to find out more. And then they can use what they learn in new forms of play."

Children enjoy many types of play, which usually fall into one of these three categories:

Exploratory play stresses action and movement. In this type of play, children learn about themselves and their world through sensory-motor awareness. Although the emphasis is on motor development, it also includes color, texture, smell, taste, and sound. These activities help children discover, examine, organize, and explore. Some toys that promote this type of play are: balls, sand and water toys, push and pull toys, slides, swings, tricycles, and finger paints.

Manipulative play stresses handling objects. When children make things move and change, they develop hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity. Children learn about the size, weight, flexibility, and temperature of things. Some interesting activities that promote manipulative play are: taking things apart and putting them back together, filling and dumping containers, stacking blocks, nesting cups, puzzles, peg boards, shape sorters, and interlocking blocks.

Imaginative or symbolic play stresses using toys to represent events in everyday life. When children imitate, role-play, and pretend, they develop healthy self-esteem, social skills, and language concepts. This play involves toys such as stuffed animals, dolls, trucks, dress-up clothes, and any real or child-sized versions of household objects. This type of play often begins to emerge around the age of 2, but becomes increasingly common and complex as the child grows.

Young toddlers who are working on the theme of autonomy are willing to play almost anything, as long as they get to choose. They often imitate the big people around them. Toddlers love to do “work” as their play. Real tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and gardening offer children a feeling of competence as well as independence.

Older toddlers begin to use pretend play to practice making decisions and to make sense of their experiences. When children pretend to be different people or familiar animals, they start to learn about understanding another person’s perspective. This offers an intellectual and creative challenge and helps develop feelings of empathy.

Parents who take part in pretend play with their children help them to develop more varied and complex play patterns. These children, in turn, engage in more pretend play with other children. They tend to be more advanced intellectually, better able to understand others’ feelings, and are more socially competent. It’s important to share leadership with your child when you share pretend play, however. Let the child initiate and control play whenever possible by letting him decide who the driver is, who the passenger is, and where the bus is going, for example. Try to respect the child’s need to repeat the same game or scenario over and over.

Remember that children, today more than ever, need ample opportunities each day for unstructured play. This means the child decides what to do and it is the child who is active, not the toy. The best toys require active participation and allow for open-ended play; in other words, they can be used in a variety of ways and work well with a child’s imagination. (This explains why many children would rather play with the box than with the electronic gizmo that came in it.) Toys that can be added to as the child grows are useful. Try to sit back and enjoy your child’s play. There’s no need to say, “Good job” when your child is engaged in play and clearly enjoying the experience. If you feel you must say something, share nonjudgmental comments by describing what you see or by asking questions.

It may seem that a pleasure as simple and accessible as play could hardly be valuable, but that is not true. Play is emotionally healing for children and the most renewable of resources, according to teacher Aileen Hewitt. Play allows children to express their emotions and gives the opportunity to experience new feelings and situations.

Resources:

Becoming the Parent You Want to Be by Laura Davis and Janis Keyser.

“Out-of-the-Box Activities” by Ellen Booth Church. *Scholastic Parent & Child*, February/March 2005.

“Play by Play.” *Healthy Kids Birth-3*. Spring/Summer 1993.

Learning Through Play. Pamphlet from American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

“The Ultimate Guide to Learning through Play” by Rory Halperin. *Child*, September 2005.

Discussion Questions Learning through Play

1. How do you think play has changed since you were a child? What made your play as a child successful (time, space, friends, toys)?
2. What kinds of play does your child enjoy? What non-toy things does your child like to play with?
3. What kinds of learning have you observed during your child's play?
4. How do you view your role in your child's play? Have there been times you've been tempted to "push" your child?
5. Are there any changes you'd like to make regarding your child's play, playthings, or your involvement in your child's play?

At-Home Page Learning through Play

Here are some activities and materials to use at home that work with each of the three types of play.

Exploratory play activities

- Play in the sink or tub with soap bubbles and plastic containers.
- Use whipped cream, pudding, or shaving cream as "finger paint" on a smooth surface.
- Make your own musical band using wooden spoons, pie plates, etc.
- Provide large cartons for climbing, hiding, and pushing.

Manipulative play materials

- Small boxes or blocks for stacking.
- Different size containers for nesting.
- Large macaroni or Cheerios for stringing onto a pipe cleaner.
- Large pipe fittings for connecting.
- A shoe box or coffee can with a slot cut into the lid. Children can put smooth juice lids, clothes pins, or playing cards into the slot.

Imaginative play ideas

- Boxes and cartons that can be transformed into a playhouse, train, rocket, truck, etc.
- A box full of old clothes, hats, scarves, gloves, small suitcases, shoes, and jewelry for dress-up.
- Make a "tent" by throwing a bedspread or sheet over a table.
- Put chairs in a line to make a pretend bus or train.
- Hand puppets made from small paper bags or socks.
- Opportunities to work with adults in cooking, cleaning, and yard work.

Suggested Reading for Parents:

Einstein Never Used Flashcards by Dr. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Dr. Roberta Mechnick Golinkoff.

Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos by Karen Miller.

Hug a Tree and Other Things to do Outdoors with Young Children by Robert E. Rockwell, et al.

I Can Do It! I Can Do It! by LaBritta Gilbert.

Your Child at Play: One to Two Years by Marilyn Segal, Ph.D., and Don Adcock, Ph.D.

Suggested Books for Children:

Why Is the Sky Blue? By Sally Grindley.

It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles Shaw.

Mouse Paint by Ellen Stoll Walsh.