

toddlers

guiding toddler behaviour when a toddler bites toileting skills

This brochure provides a brief overview of toddler behaviour. The following information also includes tips on how to assist your toddler when experiencing tantrums.

The toddler years are commonly characterised by the phrase 'Terrible Two's' or 'Terrific Two's' depending upon the type of day you have both had. Toddlers are inquisitive, ingenious and can be cooperative or contrary at a whim. These contrasts in behaviour are a normal part of development, but one which can cause parents concern. As your toddler strives for independence, she is testing her limits and capabilities. She is finding out how exciting the world is and how everything works. Toddlers need a lot of support and understanding to learn social skills.

A common response by toddlers is 'No!' This can give the impression that she does not want to cooperate. Be reassured this is normal and part of learning about life e.g. negotiating, discipline, safety and rules. How parents and carers respond to toddlers can influence how they progress through life.



What to Remember About Toddlers

- They do not have the ability to foresee the results of their actions
- Their moods change rapidly
- They want to try and test everything
- Their attention span is short

Tips on how to manage toddlers

There is much debate about the best method to guide your toddler. Following are some suggestions for managing behaviour.

- Spend time with your toddler such as reading and playing.
- This can include asking her to help you with the chores (e.g. washing the dishes).
- Praise your toddler when she cooperates, achieves (e.g. completes a painting or helps sweep the floor) or behaves well; “you did a great job of.....”
- Toddler proof your house, that is, place everything you do not want your toddler to touch out of reach, especially dangerous items.
- Try to avoid saying ‘No’ to everything she tries to explore. Divert her or distract her with something that she will find interesting.
- Allow your toddler a sense of independence by giving her limited choices (e.g. ‘would you like to wear the red dress or the blue dress?’).

- Try to ignore little misbehaviours providing no harm will come to your toddler – she may just need the space and time to work things out herself.
- Deal with misbehaviour immediately rather than threaten “just you wait until we get home”. Do not keep referring to the misbehaviour.
- Be positive, for example instead of saying, ‘don’t pull the dog’s hair’ try, “The dog likes it if you pat him like this’ and demonstrate.
- If your toddler refuses to cooperate, it may be best to remove her from the situation. If there is immediate danger with what your toddler is doing, (e.g. pulling an electrical cord), remove her from the danger. Worry about explanations once the danger has passed.

REMEMBER, Do not hit or smack toddlers. It teaches them that physical aggression is acceptable.

Tantrums

A tantrum is a toddler's way of expressing and coping with feelings she can not control. Toddlers have tantrums for many different reasons, for example anger, frustration, jealousy, tiredness, family conflict, inability to communicate or feeling insecure. When your toddler is having a tantrum, as well as having to deal with whatever triggered the tantrum, she also has to cope with the fear or humiliation she feels from being out of control.

Tantrum Management

Using some of the strategies listed will help to avert many potential areas of conflict between you and your toddler.

- Try to recognise the triggers for your toddler's tantrums and step in before a major issue develops. Try keeping a diary over a period of a few days to recognise patterns of behaviour.
- If you have said 'No' to your toddler, give her a reason. Acknowledge her feelings and then distract her by giving her something else to do. Avoid further explanations.
- If you are going shopping, plan ahead and if possible leave your toddler with someone else. If she must come shopping with you, here are some suggestions that may help:
 - ensure your toddler is not tired or sick before you venture out
 - feed your toddler before you go
 - take some healthy snacks and a drink with you
 - where possible let your toddler help by getting items from the shelves
 - try to have a routine with the shopping trip and finish off with a small healthy treat for everyone.*This gives her something to look forward to.*



- If tantrums increase at the shops, take your toddler somewhere quiet until she has regained control. Once she has calmed down, talk to her about her feelings (e.g. "you were angry that mummy said you couldn't have the lollies").
- Some experts suggest holding your toddler while she is having the tantrum. This can help contain her so that she will not injure herself. It also helps her feel secure in the knowledge that you are there to help manage her feelings (be careful to face your toddler away from you if she has a tendency to kick). If you are unable to hold your toddler you may choose to let the tantrum run its course provided she is not in any danger of hurting herself or others.
- It is important not to give in to whatever started the tantrum.
- Once the tantrum is over, give your child a cuddle to reassure her. A tantrum can be frightening for a toddler.
- Once the tantrum is over, try to do something relaxing with your toddler. For example, go for a walk in the park, listen to some soothing music together or read a story.

When a toddler bites

Toddlers (approximately 1-3 years old) may bite as a reaction to stress or feeling helpless. Biting behaviour is a normal developmental stage. Sometimes it may be in self-defence when a play situation has become less friendly. Other reasons for biting include being unable to play co-operatively, frustration at not being able to get their own way or wanting attention. It is usually short term behaviour as toddlers come to realise that biting is hurtful and coping skills develop to express their strong feelings.



What to do about biting:

- Supervise your toddler at all times, especially if you know that she is going through an anxious or stressful time.
- Watch and try to read your toddler's cues.
- Warn other parents that your toddler sometimes bites.
- Distract your toddler before biting begins.
- Avoid the temptation to bite your toddler back – this teaches her that biting is acceptable behaviour.
- Remain calm and remove your toddler from the situation.

What to do about biting?

- For a few moments keep your toddler separated from the situation that caused her to bite.
- Let her know that her feelings are real but that biting is not an acceptable way to react.
- Give extra attention to the child who has been bitten.
- After rejoining the activities, if your toddler bites again remove her from the situation for a longer period of time; e.g. 5 minutes and occupy her with something else.
- It may take several episodes of biting but your patience and persistence will be rewarded.

Toileting Skills

The following information explains when your toddler may be ready and willing to be toilet trained, and provides suggestions about how to get started. Childhood fears about toilet training are also discussed.

Toileting your toddler may take time and patience. This is a significant developmental step, for which your toddler must be ready.

When is Toilet Training Possible?

A toddler is usually physically ready from 2 years of age, however this varies. The average age of successful toilet training is 2.4 years. Girls often achieve this earlier (average 2.25 years) than boys (average 2.56 years). Daytime accidents may still occur and complete night time control can take up to 4-5 years.

If your toddler has developed voluntary control of the muscles which control the bladder (urethral sphincter) and the bowel (anal sphincter), then training will be possible. Usually from the age of 2 years, a toddler's bladder and bowel has matured enough, she has the ability to communicate with you reasonably well and she has developed the motor skills to attempt toilet training.



Signs that your toddler is ready include:

- Telling you she has wet her nappy
- Trying to remove wet/soiled nappies herself
- Fewer wet nappies during the day
- The ability to remain dry for two (2) hours or more – you may notice she is dry when she wakes up after a nap
- Able to sit in one place for a few minutes
- Showing interest in using the potty/toilet
- Showing interest in the toileting habits of other family members

Getting Started

There are several options for getting started. Your toddler will probably let you know which one she prefers. Using a potty or potty-chair enables your toddler to feel secure with her feet on the floor. Alternatively, a small set of steps with a non-slip base placed in front of a regular toilet may be used, with a child size toilet insert. She may even feel more secure facing the toilet cistern. Boys can either stand in front of the toilet to pass urine like 'daddy' or sit.

- Use simple instructions with words that you will be happy to continue using, even in public situations.
- Praise your toddler for trying. Learning to anticipate that she needs to go to the toilet can be difficult. Staying positive is important to help her.
- Dress your toddler in clothes that can be easily removed; sometimes waiting until summer time is a good idea (because she wears fewer clothes). Often your toddler has very short notice that she needs to go to the toilet.
- Use training underpants – these are similar to ordinary underpants but are made from thicker fabric. An alternative is the disposable pull up nappies.
- Take you toddler to the toilet every 2-3 hours.
- Avoid leaving your toddler sitting on the toilet for more than five minutes.
- If an accident occurs, clean it up with as little fuss as possible. Punishment will not help the situation.
- If your toddler is reluctant to use the potty/toilet do not force her and try again in a few weeks.

- Always remember to wash her hands after going to the toilet.
- Do not try toilet training if there is too much going on, e.g. a new sibling, house move, or illness.

Success with the potty/toilet may be easier to achieve with bowel motions, especially if your toddler has a regular time for bowel actions. Use this success to encourage your toddler for bladder training.

It is important that your toddler has already developed gross motor skills such as walking, sitting and squatting in addition to fine motor skills needed such as getting dressed and undressed.





Fears

Sometimes toddlers develop, what might seem to adults, to be irrational fears such as being flushed down the toilet. Your toddler could have almost fallen into the toilet or fear that she may be flushed away. It is not uncommon for toddlers to fear having their bowels open while sitting on the toilet. She may wait until her nappy is put back on. The size of the toilet in relation to her size

may also worry her. Fear of not making it to the potty or toilet in time is a possible reason she might want to wear a nappy. She will outgrow these fears. Sometimes you will need to wait several weeks or months.

Be patient and gently encouraging and together you will reach this milestone in your toddlers difficulties.

Reviewed November 2009. References available on request.

For further information and support please consult:

- Child & Family Health Nurse
- General Practitioner
- Karitane Careline on 1300 CARING (1300 227 464)

Web: www.karitane.com.au

E-mail: Karitane.online@sswahs.nsw.gov.au

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