

Tips about Toddlers

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Toddlers are:

- children between the ages of one and three years
- active and curious; they have to explore, touch, open, shut, throw and empty
- learning who they are; trying out their wills and skills, become separate independent people (all within a short space of time they can move from being independent and “I do myself” to being very needy and dependent again.)
- they are longing to feel safe and wanting to be free
- learning to be in charge of themselves; learning to walk, talk, feed themselves, toilet train
- beginning to learn about feelings and about living with others; starting to learn how to show love, how not to hurt others, how to share and take turns.

Toddlers are not able to:

- understand reason; they cannot understand why we want them to do one thing, and not another particularly when the other seems much more interesting
- sit still, wait, share or control their angry feelings; they cannot do them well yet but they will learn all these things with time and consistent management
- manage many feelings - they are often experiencing strong emotions but do not have the cognitive understanding of these feelings and what they should do with them nor do they possess the language to explain them, so they use their behaviour to tell you how they are feeling
- stop themselves from doing what we know is the wrong thing but what they may feel is the fun or interesting thing; they still need adults to remind them and to keep them safe

Common behaviour problems of toddlers:

- whinging/whining
- tantrums see handout on Toddlers and tantrums for management ideas
- hurting others - biting, hitting, pushing
- difficulties sharing
- bedtime difficulties- going to bed or staying in their own bed
- toilet training difficulties
- eating/mealtime difficulties

General suggestions:

- Make your statements or requests to toddlers in the positive rather than the negative as the toddler often won't process the whole sentence- rather than say "Don't go over to the door" say "come over here"
- If your child does not follow your directions make sure you have their attention - go closer to them and get their eye contact rather than call out across the room
- If the issue is not negotiable and the child doesn't have a choice don't give them a choice - e.g. don't say "would you like to pick up the toys for mummy?" as you might get a no and you have given them the choice and set yourself up for a battle. Just say firmly and calmly- "let's pick up the toys then we can play with something else".
- Give them your positive attention when they are doing what you require of them
- Stay calm when dealing with difficult behaviour and minimise the attention they get for this
- Tell them firmly what you require and help them carry this out - perhaps model what is required – "we pat the puppy gently" - take their hand and show them how to do it
- Be persistent and be consistent
- Help children learn about feelings and how to express them
 - Give names to feelings for your young child so that they learn that feelings are something that you can talk about and learn to manage. For example you could say, "*You're feeling sad because Daddy had to go to work*" or "*I can see you're feeling very angry*".
 - Read stories that show children with different kinds of feelings - angry, happy, sad, afraid etc.
 - Separate feelings from behaviour. For example you might say "*I know you feel angry but you must not hit. When you feel angry you can come and tell me*".
 - Begin to help children understand the difference between their own feelings and the feelings of others. For example you could say "*It hurts the kitty when you hit him, let's pat him very gently* (show them how to do this) *and make him feel better*".
- Plan ahead for outings you know may be a problem; like shopping, visiting friends or having friends visit you.
 - Try to make sure they are not over tired and don't over stay their tolerance
 - Prepare them for the trip and tell them what is going to happen.
 - If you plan on giving them a reward for good behaviour tell them what is expected and what they will get
 - Take a toy of interest with them
 - When you go shopping you could involve them by giving them little tasks to do like holding things for you or pointing out various things
- If you try a new behavioural strategy be prepared to apply it for a good week or so consistently before you can be sure of whether it is working. The behaviour usually worsens initially (increases in frequency or severity) as the child is usually confused about the change and they need to learn that you are going to stick to the strategy consistently

Seeking help

If you are unsure how to manage a particular problem you can seek advice from a child psychologist or attend a parenting group.

The Lakeside Rooms has a number of experienced Child Psychologists and also conducts Triple P Parenting groups - go to www.lakesiderooms.com.au and look up 'groups' or call the Lakeside Rooms on 55620466 for more details.

Useful Parenting websites:

- Parent Easy Guides (<http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au/pegs/>)
Contains detailed behaviour management advice and tip sheets
- Initiative parents resources
(<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/#Component%20%20%20resource%20table>) Contains many downloadable resources for parents in relation to children's mental health and wellbeing.
- Positive Parenting Resources
(<http://www.positiveparenting.com/resources/resources.html>)
- Australian Childhood Foundation (<http://www.kidscount.com.au>)
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/>)
- Early Childhood Australia (<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/>)
- Families Australia (<http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/>)
- Family Relationships (<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/>)
- Raising Children Network (<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>)
- Parenting Teens (<http://parentingteens.about.com/>)
- Parentlink (<http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au/index>)
Government advise site for parenting children and teenagers
- Childhood Charts (<http://childhoodcharts.com>)
Positive resources to aid parents to reinforce appropriate childhood behaviours

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