



Grow!

A newsletter for parents of
toddlers | issue 8 | 34-36 months

Think About Health and Safety

Can you believe your toddler is almost a preschooler? And you have survived too—despite all the bad press toddlerhood receives. Looking ahead, three is for many children an age of compliance, sharing, and comfortable relationships, a nice thought to take along as you and your toddler round that corner.

Want to give your toddler a special third birthday gift? Take a few minutes to look at him or her from head to toe.

Eyes: Studies show that approximately one in every 20 preschool age children has a vision problem that may seriously interfere with learning. You can request a free Home Eye Test by writing to:

Prevent Blindness Iowa
1111 Ninth Street, Suite 250
Des Moines, Iowa 50314
515-244-4341
E-mail: pbiowa@netins.net
<http://www.preventblindness.org>

Though this doesn't take the place of a professional eye exam, it can be an important initial screening.



Teeth: Now is the time to check with the family dentist (if you haven't already). You can request the pamphlet, *Your Child's Teeth* (outlines the development and care of children's teeth) by writing to:

American Dental Association
211 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611
312-440-2500
<http://www.ada.org>

Ears: Several hearing alert brochures are available from:

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf
3417 Volta Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007-2778
202-337-5220 (voice)
202-337-5221 (TTY)
<http://www.agbell.org>

Body: Are you worried about anything else? No fear or worry is trivial if it causes you anxiety. Discuss your feelings with the medical practitioner of your choice.

Also, it's a good idea to check your own health. A healthy parent can help ensure a healthy family.

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Be Good to Yourself

Remember that you have some basic rights. Amid all the challenges of parenting, it may be helpful to consider these basic rights of all people.

- A right to feel proud about what's good about yourself.
- A right to refuse requests and not feel guilty or selfish.
- A right to have your opinions given the same respect and consideration that other people's opinions are given.
- A right to use your judgment in deciding what your needs are.
- A right to have your needs be as important as the needs of other people.
- A right to strive for self-fulfillment.
- A right to make mistakes.
- A right to be forgiven.

Give yourself positive messages. You talk to yourself all the time, even if you don't do it out loud. You tell yourself how you should behave, and how you feel about yourself. If you tell yourself only bad things, you're going to end up feeling lousy. You know the kind of bad messages: "No one likes me," "I never seem to do anything right." Most people are experts at whispering negative secrets in their own ears.

Try telling yourself positive things. "I'm pretty smart," "I'm OK just the way I am." You'll feel better about yourself. Remember, a winner learns from mistakes; a loser learns to avoid mistakes by not trying.

Things Toddlers Treasure

From 34 to 36 months, toddler play is characterized by a desire to increase understanding of the relationship between parts and whole. Toddlers like to:

- combine all kinds of playthings,
- dress up for “make believe,”
- take discarded household things apart (or anything else).

A joy and pride in their “creations” cause toddlers of this age to:

- make things for special people (and then ask for them back),
- yell “look what I made” to parents and friends (no matter

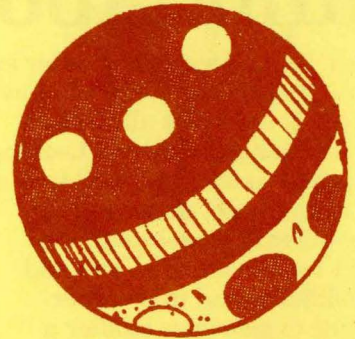
what you are doing or where you are—they have been known to slip masterpieces under bathroom doors),

- work for long periods on special projects (only they know which ones are special) and short seconds on many parent-designated jobs.

By the end of toddlerhood, they may delight in:

- private talks with other children,
- surprises of all kinds,
- dramatic play with special friends (dress up clothes are a real treat now).

As toddlerhood ends, children are able to express an interest in others, enjoy trying new challenges, and display the beginnings of self-control over their lives. Not bad for just three years, is it?



What's Happening to Your Toddler?

Look at your toddler's body. No longer top heavy, your slightly knock-kneed child walks well, runs easily, swings his or her arms enthusiastically, and turns corners without batting an eye. There is still much “putting off to the last minute,” so toilet accidents, though fewer, are common.



Naps may begin to disappear (not for all), but toddlers will usually still stay in bed for a “quiet time” (yours and theirs). Bedtime routine may be getting easier now, and often fewer toys are needed in bed.

“Me do it!” is a common 34- to 36-month old expression, even when there isn't the slightest chance that your child can complete the task. Toddlers view themselves as big kids now, so “Let's do it together” usually works better than “You can't do that; you're too little.”

With an average vocabulary of 850 words, your toddler probably has plenty to say. If you have heard stuttering, try not to worry; it's normal at this age. It usually disappears if you draw no attention to it. It's as if your toddler's mind is working faster than his or her mouth. If the stuttering continues, check with your doctor or speech clinician.

Minds of Their Own

Has your toddler told you that he or she loves you? This is the age when parents start to hear “I love you” and “I like it so much.” Of course, your toddler has felt this way about you for years, but it's nice to hear, isn't it?

Most toddlers can now identify a square, triangle, and circle, but they can draw only a circle. Though scribbling has been replaced by drawing, scribbling behavior often comes back for “fun.”

Some 34- to 36-month-olds may be very sensitive to the reaction of others. They may tell you (or others) “don't look” or “don't laugh.” They embarrass very easily. Toddlers turning three are often experts at changing the subject of conversations that make them feel uneasy. When you say “Why did you hit the dog?” they may reply, “I made a tunnel in the basement.” Don't worry, you are not going crazy and they are not going deaf. This is the way many young children deal with being put on the spot. When you think about it, it's pretty effective.

Children continue to grow each day. As they approach the preschool years, one thing remains the same. All children develop at their own rates and in their own ways.

Focus on Guidance

Should you punish your child for throwing blocks? What should you do if your child bites? How do you handle a toddler who goes on a sit-down strike in the middle of the grocery store? Ask anyone. Nearly everybody you know has an opinion about disciplining children. Perhaps this is because everyone has been exposed to a discipline system and everyone has been a child. Most often these opinions are as varied as the people who hold them. What then is discipline and guidance?

Discipline is a way to change or control toddler behavior. It is part of a guidance system. Guidance means helping children learn to control themselves and display feelings in socially acceptable ways.

The discipline you use affects your child in many ways. First, it affects short-term behavior or how your toddler acts right after you discipline him or her. Does your discipline stop behavior quickly? Second, it influences long-term behavior or how your child acts later on. Do you see a change over time in your toddler's behavior? Third, discipline affects your child's self-esteem. How does your discipline make your toddler feel?

Here is a list of resources to help you become familiar with different views of discipline. Use those that best fit your value system and allow your child to develop a healthy self-esteem.

Parenting Young Children. Helpful strategies based on Systematic Training for Effective Parenting—STEP—for Parents of Children under Six. By Dan Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay, 1997.

How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, New York: Avon 1999.

Contact your county extension office for further information about parenting resources and programs. Ask for the *Understanding Children*, series PM 1529, which offers information on guidance.

Take a Closer Look at Toys

By now you probably have acquired quite a collection of toys at your home. As your child grows, so do skills and interests. Playthings are often combined in creative and interesting ways. If toys are too simple or too difficult, many resourceful toddlers alter use (and sometimes shape if the frustration level is high enough).

A veteran toy store clerk once observed "In seven years, only two parents (grandparents, relatives, friends) have come into my store to buy toys for average children. Everyone else buys for exceptional children. I sell pedal cars for nine-month-olds and chemistry sets for three-year-olds and it scares me."

The point of the toy clerk's story is simple. Because children are special to their families, common sense is not always used when toys are purchased. Here are a few things to consider when buying toys for your toddler:

Buy basics. Toys that sell year after year are most often good choices (blocks, building systems, well-made dolls, small sturdy cars and trucks).

Consider recommended ages. These are included to help

you estimate the appropriateness and safety of the toy.

Beware of toys that only do one thing. These toys often lose their attractiveness very quickly.

Be safe. The Consumer Products Safety Commission offers a free brochure on toy safety "For Kids Sake." To obtain a copy write, Publications Request, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington D.C. 20207 or visit their Web site at <http://www.cpsc.gov/>.



Reach Out to Extension

Throughout this newsletter series we have suggested many bulletins and pamphlets from your local extension office. If you can't stop in, phone your local office to have materials mailed to you.

Now is an excellent time to begin planning for life with a preschooler. Here are several publications that

will help you and your toddler grow into the preschool years.

Getting Along series, PM 1650-1653
Ages and Stages, PM 1530E,F,G
Children and Their Clothes, Pm-849 (ages 3 through 5)

Preschoolers in Motion and Preschool Fitness Activities, PM 1359A-B
Kindergarten Ahead, PM 784
Three to Five, So Alive! PM 1431A-F

And So Forth. . .

Play is the most natural way for your child to learn. Armed with an insatiable curiosity, your toddler learns through play to share, cooperate, respect differences, and care for others. It is not unusual for parents to wonder if their toddlers are "normal" because they don't seem to play well with other children. As a part of normal development, toddlers engage primarily in parallel play (playing next to but not with others). Most are not ready to play with other children until the very end of toddlerhood. Even then, much hoarding, little sharing, and short duration playing occurs.

File: Family Life 8

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Parents are their child's first teacher. Take a few minutes to watch your child play. Acknowledge the "right" behavior whenever you see it and always be available for support.

Happy parenting!



. . . and justice for all

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