

Dear Baby TALK Parents,

Deep thinking explorers, two-year-old children are ready to take on the world with confidence and ability!

Asking questions, solving problems, expressing their needs – these toddlers have gained many tools to use in their ventures. Although he may still be struggling with issues of independence and negativism, your two-year-old is probably often giggly and affectionate. He needs you and he enjoys you, and you certainly enjoy him.

Your relationship with your toddler continues to be the single most important contributor to his own self-esteem. He enjoys his conversations with you and especially when you bend down to his level and look him in the eye when he has something exciting to share with you. Your kindness and interest in him tell him that he is loved and reassured. Likewise, when you have something important to tell him, he may listen better if you get on his eye level.

PLAYTIME

Your two-year-old enjoys large motor play like running, climbing, walking up stairs, jumping and learning to navigate riding toys. He uses small muscles to play with blocks, puzzles and scribbling. You can observe him at play as he **thinks through** a problem to discover a solution.

Parents and toddlers are eager to introduce their child to playmates. Playmates provide important learning opportunities, but parents must remember that twos are still mostly interested in themselves. They are not apt to share their toys. You should talk with your child about **sharing** before friends arrive, and give him the opportunity to put

away any toys which he does not want to share. When he is with playmates, you will notice that they still spend most of their time in **parallel play**, playing near each other and imitating each other, but not really interacting much.

Inevitably, when toddlers play together, one will become aggressive in play. This is an opportunity to talk about how people don't like to be pushed or have toys taken away! Your child will need you to stop him and help him learn to control himself. Tell him that he will have to be removed from his friends if he treats them this way, and then follow through if he does. Afterwards, talk about the important job he must learn to do: control himself.

Learning to interact socially is a challenge for toddlers. Their failure to do so doesn't mean they are "bad," but rather that they are **learning**. And toddlers, like their parents, learn most from their mistakes.

LANGUAGE

Your child has probably started using simple sentences as she expresses herself to you. Most two-year-olds speak in two or three-word sentences or phrases, like "Go to store" or "Pretty dress." Most twos are beginning to ask a lot of questions about their world. The word **why?** is used almost as much as the word **no!** by two-year-olds! Your toddler can still understand much more language than she can express, and will continue to rely on gestures to help get her point across. Offer a gentle push by saying, "I think I know what you want, but I'd like you to say it to me. Is it a truck. . . or a house. . . or a ball?"

There is an enormous range of "normal" language ability at this age, as some toddlers use as few as a dozen words while others talk all day long with a vocabulary of several hundred words. Your toddler may stutter as her ideas come more quickly than her mouth can form the words. It's similar to falling over her feet when learning to walk. The less fuss made about this stuttering, the better. Don't pressure her by correcting her or finishing her sentences for her. Listen patiently, and give her time to get the words together. This stuttering is a very common occurrence through out the pre-school years and is almost always self-correcting.

WHAT ABOUT TV?

Most toddlers will not sit too long in front of a TV set. (Thank goodness!) It is understandably easy for a parent to become dependent on TV as a babysitter for a child. However, this habit can be unhealthy for several reasons. Time spent in front of a TV is time not spent on other activities your toddler needs for exercise and learning. Too much TV can encourage a child to become passive—a spectator of life rather than a participant! And although this may be difficult to understand, watching television can be **exhausting** for a toddler, requiring all of her senses and concentration to "tune in" and stay attentive. She may actually become out-of-control after watching TV for a long period of time. She has used a lot of energy, without the opportunity to dispense with the stress through physical activity. She may need some reassurance from you after a long watching period.

You are already aware that children model aggression and violence from TV watching. Fortunately, they can also gain positive behaviors from the judicious use of television. "Caillou" and "Sesame Street" are examples of age-appropriate TV shows for toddlers. Television will not harm your toddler if you use it within these guidelines from Dr. T. Berry Brazelton in his book, Touchpoints:

- Choose programs carefully.
- Toddlers should watch no more than one-half hour at a time. This can be done twice a day.
- Watch TV with your toddler! Be prepared to talk about the program, and let your child talk about it with you.

LET'S DO IT AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND . . .

Have you noticed how much your toddler likes **sameness** and **routines**? He feels in control of his day when he knows what is coming next. He likes to be told what's going to happen next, and will probably want you to go over his day with him again and again. He is crazy about any activity he can count on (going to the library on Fridays, having juice and a cracker after his nap) and may even drive you a little crazy with his insistence on always doing things the same way. What is going on here?

As your toddler has recognized what a complex world he lives in, he has come to learn how to manage it if it has an understandable structure. Any structure he can impose gives him a feeling of confidence and security. This need for structure is so great that he can even accept activities he would rather avoid (like bedtime) if they can be surrounded by a predictable routine which he can somehow control. A routine at bedtime or naptime (brush teeth, get a drink, read a story, sing a song,



kiss Teddy, kiss Mom) can turn this event from a battleground into a loving episode. You may hear him in his bed talking to himself as he re-creates his day, going over all

the activities in it. He is comforting himself to sleep by his replay of his daily routine.

Children's interest in being "Mother's" or "Father's Helper" is greater at the age of two than at any other time. Partly, this interest is the enjoyment of tasks which can always be done the same way; setting the table, emptying the waste basket or rinsing a plastic dish. These chores are another example of comforting routines. A child who is able to contribute in this way to his family earns a great boost to his self-esteem from the knowledge that he is useful. Letting him help in this way takes time and energy now, but will pay off in years to come!

PLEASE READ IT AGAIN

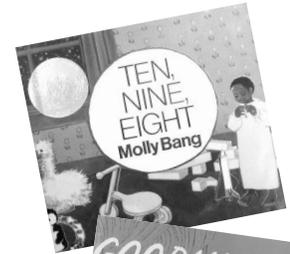
As part of his desire to "keep everything the same," your toddler will undoubtedly go through a time when he wants you to read him the same book **over and over** again. You may wonder why he is stuck on this particular book when he has many other good books to choose from, and you may not have been particularly fond of his favorite to begin with. You may be tempted to hide this book so you won't have to read it again. You know he has it memorized, so there's no way you can skip any pages!

Congratulations! When your child has "connected" with a book in this way, you can be sure that he has discovered the special joy of books. Read it to him often, and keep enticing him with other books as well. He will soon move on to other books, much to your relief!

BEDTIME BOOKS

Try making these wonderful bedtime books part of your toddler's going-to-sleep routine:

- Ten, Nine, Eight
- Molly Bang,
- Tupelo Books 1998
- Hushabye
- John Burningham,
- Random 2001
- Kiss Good Night
- Amy Hest, Illus. by Anita Jeram, Candlewick 2001
- Goodnight Moon
- Margaret Wise Brown,
- Illus. by Clement Hurd, Harper 1947
- Good Night, Gorilla
- Peggy Rathman, Puffin 2000
- Goodnight, Goodnight
- Eve Rice, Greenwillow 1980
- Pajama Time!
- Sandra Boynton, Workman 2000
- Hushabye
- John Burningham, Random 2001
- More More More, Said the Baby
- Vera Williams, Greenwillow 1990
- Goodnight, Max
- Rosemary Wells,
- Penguin Putnam 2000



For a thorough discussion of all the interesting ins and outs of living with a two-year-old, you may enjoy reading Your Two-Year-Old: Terrible or Tender by Louise Bares Ames & Frances Ilg of the Gesell Institute of Child Development. Dell, 1980.

BEST WISHES FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT BABY TALK

 **Baby TALK**

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