



Dear Baby TALK Parents,

Living with an eighteen-month-old child certainly has its ups and downs! He is sometimes happy, cooperative and loving, and other times frustrated and negative. He runs at random (some say these tots "Think with their feet!"), continually investigating everything he contacts. He is capable of doing so much more than he could have a few months ago, but becomes easily frustrated because he cannot always count on his body to do what he wants it to do.

By eighteen months, your child probably has developed a real passion for his **independence**. He has by now developed a pretty good sense of who he is, which demonstrates itself positively in his **pride in accomplishments** and negatively in his **possessiveness of his toys** and other personal belongings. He desperately wants to do things his own way. He wants to decide what he eats, how long he plays outside and when he goes to bed. At the same time, he searches for limits because he knows he is not yet able to control himself. Becoming his own person is a long and **very important** growth process. The end result will be a competent, self-controlled, successful human being. When you become frustrated with him, try to remember that **toddlers, like their parents, learn most from their mistakes!**

You may have noticed that your child wants to make many of his own decisions, and yet is overwhelmed if his choices are not somewhat limited. For eighteen-month-olds, it is usually a mistake to say, "*Wear this shirt.*" He will balk at his lack of choice. Similarly, he may be overwhelmed if you ask, "*What do you want to wear?*" (And you may not approve his choice!) A better approach is to ask, "*Do you want to wear this striped shirt or this red sweatshirt today?*" With limited choices, he will feel capable to meet the challenge and will enjoy being the decision-maker. Children who get lots of practice at making little decisions in the early years will be more confident at making big decisions in the years to come.



NO! NO! NO!

Both you and your child are probably saying "**No!**" at this stage. **You** must say "No" to protect her from activities which threaten her safety, and in order to teach her to become a civilized person. And "No" has possibly become **her** favorite word. It may be her answer to most of your requests, and may be accompanied by a vigorous shaking of her head from side to side. Of course, you know that it is her way of exerting her independence and will, and yet it is natural for you to look forward to the day when she is not driven to be negative!

Temper tantrums are part of your toddler's growth toward independence. A tantrum is a symptom of your toddler's inner turmoil, and is often her way of expressing that she has had enough or things have gone too wrong and she is simply overwhelmed. Tantrums can sometimes be averted by a watchful parent who can see this inner turmoil mounting and can divert a toddler's attention. Once a tantrum begins, however, only your child can control it. You can help most by **taking time out** (pick up your toddler and hold her quietly or put her somewhere safe to "throw" her tantrum) or **walking away** (walk out of sight until the tantrum is over.) When the tantrum is over, reassure your child that you love her, and let the tantrum be over. One of the blessings of the toddler's short attention span is that she can literally go from tears to laughter in a matter of moments! Temper tantrums are one way that young children demonstrate the powerful emotions they experience. For a thoughtful discussion on the topic, you might be interested in Dr. Alicia Lieberman's book, *The Emotional Life of the Toddler*, Simon & Schuster 1993.

PARENT'S PAL

It's a paradox: Even though your child is struggling to become his own person



with an identity separate from you, she is still fiercely in love with you. She loves her parents "best of all" and continues to want to be near you whenever she can. You may notice that she is modeling her behavior after yours. At this age, toddlers begin to seriously imitate their parents in posture, in attitude and in activities. "Helping" with household chores is a favorite game for her. Letting her "work" alongside of you will make her feel good about herself and also enable you to supervise her play. Of course, she won't set the table as well as you do, but she will take pride in her effort and become more proficient in time!

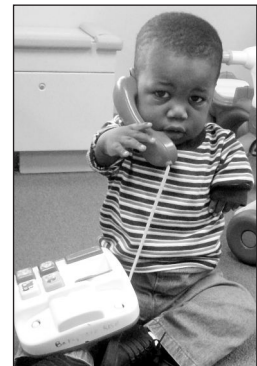
Even more importantly, being involved with these everyday activities is the single best way for toddlers to **learn** about their world. Folding the laundry, setting the table, taking out the garbage, picking up the toys—parents don't enjoy these mundane activities much because we've done them so

often that we've become bored with them. But to a curious toddler, these performances are refreshing, new, fascinating. What better way to learn about colors, textures, sorting and classification than by folding laundry? And when a parent is willing to **talk through tasks** (use words to describe what is going on), what better way to learn new words?

Parents are often concerned that they should be "teaching" their toddlers. And yet the most important "learning" for any toddler is the pleasure of enjoying everyday experiences with a loving adult who is willing to share those experiences patiently. Toddlers are being bombarded with sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches on a daily basis. When adults talk to them about these sensations in their world, children begin to lay down the "connections" in their brains for processing this information. Therefore, the most important brain development comes not from flashcards and teaching drills, but from a growing understanding of **how the world works**.

PLAYTIME: LET'S PRETEND

One of the great pleasures of this age is that your child is able to **pretend**. He likes to pretend that a block is a car, pushing it along an imaginary road. He has imaginary conversations on the telephone, and loves nothing more than a "tea party" with you, especially if he gets to do the pouring. The development of the **abstract thinking** skills necessary for him to pretend are an amazing accomplishment for a young child. You should feel very proud when you see your child make this important "leap" to symbolic play.



Play is your toddler's most powerful way of learning. He will use play to test all of his new thinking skills. He not only enjoys imitating you but now also learns by imitating other children. This is a great age to introduce your child to one or two playmates. Your toddler may not cooperate in play with another toddler, but he will play alongside another child and imitate behaviors. Remember that toddlers playing together need constant supervision as their behaviors break down. A toddler is not ready to share his belongings. He is still very busy with the task of becoming his own person!

FAVORITE PLAY ACTIVITIES



Most eighteen-month-olds love balls, empty boxes, dolls and four-wheeled low riding toys. They love to play with pots and pans, blocks, play-dough and simple puzzles.

They usually enjoy bathtime and the water play that it allows: pouring, dumping and squeezing sponges. Most toddlers like scribbling with large crayons and wadding up and tearing paper. Almost every eighteen-month-old delights in taking things apart. Most of these activities result in **making a mess**. It is important to remember that your child makes these messes unintentionally, and not for the purpose of making your life harder! You may discover ways to limit the mess, perhaps by assisting him in putting away one set of playthings before getting out another. Once again, parent supervision can make a positive difference. A parent's presence during playtime also enables a toddler to seek assistance when he finds a task too difficult, and to seek approval when he has accomplished some new skill. Your smile or hug will let him know that you think his job of growing and learning is important.



LANGUAGE

You are probably seeing a real growth in your toddler's language ability. She understands simple questions and uses a few words meaningfully, even perhaps putting a couple of words together.

You can enhance her language by "stretching" her talk. If she says "Drink," or "Want drink," you can respond by saying, "You want a drink of water." Although she may be frustrated at being unable to say what she means, her receptive language is much more developed. She can follow simple instructions. Be sure to get her attention before telling her to do something by tapping her on the shoulder and looking her in the eyes. And be aware that sometimes eighteen-month-olds understand directions perfectly, but choose to ignore them anyway!

SIMPLE STORIES

Toddlers can begin to follow a simple story that has a beginning, a middle and an end. They have come to understand cause and effect: that one event can cause another to happen. Stories set up a situation, then a problem occurs, and in the end the problem is solved. Stories may eventually teach your child how to solve some of his own problems! Share these outstanding simple story books with your toddler:

- The Three Bears
- Byron Barton, Harper 1991
- Mr. Gumpy's Outing.
- John Burningham, Holt 1970
- Sam's Cookie
- Barbro Lindgren, Illustrated by Eva Eriksson, Morrow 1982
- Brave Bear
- Kathy Mallat, Walker 1999
- Benny Bakes a Cake
- Eve Rice, Greenwillow 1981
- Also, Sam Who Never Forgets, 1977
- Where is Ben?
- Marisabina Russo, Greenwillow 1990
- Silly Little Goose!
- Nancy Tafuri, Scholastic 2001



BEST WISHES FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT BABY TALK

 **BabyTALK**

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