



Dear Baby TALK Parents,

What interesting characters two-and-a-half-year-old children are! You have probably learned that living with your thirty-month-old is both a joy and a challenge. It is this age that spawned the term **terrible twos**, and yet children at this age are funny, sometimes cooperative and usually very loving. Determined to do things their own way, two-and-a-halves also have the belief that their parents are all-powerful and simply wonderful.

Truly, this is the age of **contradictions**. One minute your child may be confidently set on doing things for himself, and the next minute he won't even try, totally overwhelmed by the task. One day he loves green beans, and the next day he won't even touch them. If Daddy's dressing him, he wants Mommy. If Mommy's dressing him, he wants Daddy!

Your child is not unusual if making decisions is hard for him right now. This is the age at which decision-making is the most difficult. He may vacillate back and forth on even the simplest decisions and when he finally makes a choice, change his mind immediately.

You can often help with painful decisions by limiting his choices. Instead of asking, "*What toy should we play with now?*" you might ask, "*Should we play ball or build with blocks?*" He may even struggle with this narrow choice, but he needs practice in decision-making. On days when he seems overwhelmed by it all, you can just invite him to join a favorite activity with you, thereby skipping the decision altogether. But don't be surprised if he balks because it is not his ideal!

Other factors contribute to the **inner turmoil** your child is feeling now. His mental development has surpassed both his physical development and his language development at this time. He is probably frustrated that he cannot make his **body do** or his **mouth say** all that his **mind can conceive**. **Toilet training** may be creating pressure for him. Even if he seems to have mastered training at this early age, he still feels tension at the task of keeping clean and dry. It may help you cope with his sometimes difficult behavior to realize that life is often difficult for him just now. In a few months he will be a much more contented person as he gains confidence in decision-making, moving and talking. It may also help to know that the age of three, which is coming up soon for your toddler, is often one of the most pleasurable stages of parenting. Remember: The challenges that face you now are mostly temporary!

TENSION RELIEF

With so much turmoil going on inside your little person, don't be surprised to see an increase of tension-relieving behaviors. **Nail-biting, thumb-sucking, stuttering** and **temper tantrums** are very common at this age, and may be providing a necessary outlet for your toddler's frustration. It may be best not to hassle children about these habits at this age, and it is definitely not the age to take away the "love" or security blanket. Later, your child will have fewer frustrations and more skills for coping with the ones she has. The tension of this age is exhausting for many children who may exhibit signs of tiredness, such as **whining** or an increased need for rest. It is important that your toddler has plenty of sleep to cope with the demands of her life. Insist on an afternoon nap and an early bedtime. You will both benefit!

If your child bites her nails or sucks her thumb, don't make an issue of it just now. If she stutters, listen patiently and resist the urge to finish her sentences for her. And if she throws a temper tantrum, remember that the less you involve yourself in it, the sooner she will learn to control her temper herself. Simply walk away, and after it is over you can reassure her that you love her very much but only **she** can learn to control her temper.

PLAYTIME

A fun aspect of this age is your child's developing **sense of humor** which leads her to giggle over silly behavior, role playing, unexpected events and mispronounced words. You may also notice that she can sometimes play **with** other children



now, not just **near** them. Aggression between toddlers remains a problem, however, so your supervision is needed.

RITUALS




Having begun to "sort out" her world, your toddler demands **sameness** in her environment. She likes having things done the **same way** in the **same order**. She wants things put always in the **same appropriate place**. It may upset her for Aunt Sue to sit in Daddy's chair.

She has such a desperate need for sameness and order at this age that your child may set up her own **rituals**. Rituals help her avoid having to make choices and give her a feeling of control. Rituals can be a help to parents in that they can prepare a child for bedtime or make bath or dressing or meals easier ("*We **always** sit down at the table when we eat.*") But rituals can create problems, too, if you need to put her to bed quickly and she needs three books read to her and twelve stuffed animals tucked in one by one! Generally, trying to "skip" parts of rituals saves little time and results in a disoriented, upset child.



BOOKS: A PLEASURABLE DELIGHT

When you and your toddler are on a collision course, and things have just gone too wrong for him, you can often avert disaster by sitting down together and **reading a book!** Reading aloud together provides the single best transition activity we know about. When parents and children read together, a number of positive things happen naturally:

-  You sit close together. When your toddler is tense, he may resist a hug. By the end of the story, his body will have relaxed and he may be leaning into you to receive the cuddling he needs for reassurance.
-  You both leave your frustrations behind. When you read a book, it requires that you leave behind the thoughts that filled your head moments before in order to enter into the story. A book removes us from our present situation and takes us to a new place mentally.
-  You get a fresh start. The bad feelings are gone, and in their place is the shared experience you've just had together. You and your toddler are much more likely to be in harmony after sharing a story.

And of course, in addition to helping your toddler out of a "bad situation," books also help develop his imagination, his language skills and his ability to pay attention. And most importantly, books are **just plain fun!** You may be amazed at how much you too will enjoy the many wonderful children's books available at your library!

REPETITION BOOKS

Knowing how much your toddler enjoys ritual and routine and keeping things the same, you can understand why he would probably enjoy **repetition books**. These books repeat the same words over and over again. Youngsters learn these lines and enjoy saying them with you as you read the book. Being able to recite these lines makes toddlers feel more capable and in control, and thereby adds to their self-confidence. These books feature repetition:

- [The Very Hungry Caterpillar](#)
Eric Carle, Philomel 1994



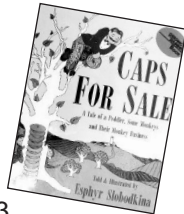
- [The Chick and the Duckling](#)
Mirra Ginsburg, Illustrated by Jose & Ariane Aruego, Macmillan 1988

- [Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed](#)
Eileen Christelow, Houghton Mifflin 1998



- [Drummer Hoff](#)
Barbara Emberley, Illustrated by Ed Emberley, Simon & Schuster 1987

- [Caps for Sale](#)
Esphyr Slobodkina, Harper 1947



- [The Gingerbread Boy](#)
Retold and illustrated by Paul Galdone, Clarion 1983

- [Three Billy Goats Gruff](#)
Retold and illustrated by Thea Kliros, Harper Festival 2003

- [The Wheels on the Bus](#)
Adapt. and illus. by Paul O. Zelinsky, Dutton 1990

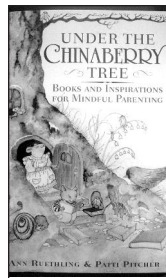


- [Fiddle-I-Fee](#)
Illus. by Melissa Sweet, Little, Brown 2002

Don't be surprised if you hear the repeated lines from these stories showing up in your child's playtime as well!

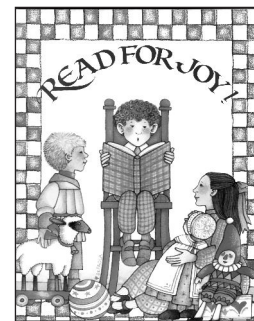
HOW CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOOD CHILDREN'S BOOKS?

You may be aware that there is an enormous treasury of wonderful books available for young children, but not aware of how to find out about them. The best way we know is to visit the library and talk to the children's librarians present. It is their **business** to know about these books, and every librarian we know takes special delight in finding a book that is **just right** for each child. If your child has enjoyed a particular book, tell the librarian about it and she may be able to recommend a similar one. Don't be afraid to let your child "browse" at the library. A book that you might not notice may have special appeal to her.



A good one is [Under the Chinaberry Tree: Books and Inspirations for Mindful Parenting](#), by Ann Ruethling & Patti Pitcher. (Broadway Books, 2003.) This book combines a handbook on the joys of parenting with reviews of more than 200 of the best books for young children.

You may also be interested in a publication of Baby TALK's entitled [Read for Joy!](#) This book guides you through the stages of reading with your child, infancy to adolescence, and relates reading to the developmental needs of each stage. It may be checked out from the library or purchased directly from Baby TALK.



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