



# Growing & Learning— the Toddler

## 18 months to 3 years

Toddlers learn by doing. From 18 months to 3 years children learn what their bodies can do. They master many new skills.

Toddlers need to try things for themselves. They may be clumsy at first, but over time, they improve. They need chances to play with people, especially other children.

Toddlers also need reasonable rules and safe places to play and explore. Encourage and praise your toddler as she learns new things. Help your toddler when he needs it.

### **Spend time together; have fun!**

Each section of this fact sheet looks at how a toddler develops from 18 months to 3 years.

These are guidelines for what most children learn during this period. Each child is an individual. Some will get there sooner; others, later.

## **MOVING AND PLAYING**

### **a) Gross motor skills**

- walks alone by 18 months
- climbs onto chair or object to reach what they want
- pulls a toy on a string
- kicks a ball forward
- throws a small ball overhand
- jumps in place with both feet together
- runs well
- walks up stairs alternating feet; goes down stairs, 2 feet to a step
- rides a tricycle using pedals by 3 years



### **b) Fine Motor Skills**

- turns pages of a book
- holds a crayon and scribbles
- builds tower of 3 blocks
- does easy puzzles (e.g. 4 - 8 pieces)
- holds a crayon with thumb and fingers and copies lines and circles
- cuts with scissors



### **c) Things I can do myself**

- chews food/drinks from a cup
- takes off clothes (may need help with buttons or zippers)
- washes and dries hands
- enjoys learning to look after self
- puts on coat or jacket
- carries dishes to the sink
- uses a spoon without spilling and starts to use a fork
- helps brush own teeth (parents need to supervise)



## d) Social/play

- curious about other children – may touch, pull or hit to get a reaction; may need to learn how to touch other children gently
- enjoys the company of other children; plays along-side children at 18 months
- finds it hard to take turns. Able to wait or give attention for only a short time.
- 2 1/2 year old has trouble sharing. "Mine!" is still a key word.
- children are creative in their play; they can pretend that a saucepan is a hat or that a chair is a train.
- begins doing interactive play with other children at 3 years



## What parents can do to help

- Play different games with your child. Playing ball, chasing games, splashing in the tub, pounding toys and action songs are fun and good for developing large muscles.
- Provide crayons and paper, simple puzzles, building toys and musical instruments to help develop fine motor skills.
- Put out finger foods and allow them to feed themselves, even if they are messy.
- Give children a chance to help you and do things for themselves; e.g. picking up their toys and carrying things to the table.
- When your child is playing with another child, be ready to encourage taking turns and helping when they disagree. Children who have the chance to play with others begin to learn to take turns and ask for things.
- Include structure and routine in your child's day. For example, keep meal times and bedtime the same each day. It gives your child a sense of security.
- Take your child to parks, playgrounds, and drop-in programs e.g. Family Places, Community Centres.
- Praise your child's efforts. Children need encouragement, e.g. "You did it all by yourself!"

## When to be concerned

- Your child is not walking on own by 18 months.
- Your child still walks on tiptoes at 2 years, most of the time.
- Your child usually sits in a "reverse W" position and rarely chooses any other position.
- Your child is not able to hold a crayon or felt pen and scribble by 2 years.
- Your child shows no interest or curiosity in other children.
- Is often aggressive with others at 3 years



## FEELINGS

- lives in the present moment, e.g. "I want it now!"
- sees things totally from their own point of view
- experiences many feelings and is easily frustrated – temper tantrums often result
- plays or acts out feelings that they cannot talk about, e.g. if someone takes their toy they might hit the other child
- has loving attachment to parents; may get upset when parent leaves – separation anxiety
- strongly motivated to be independent and assert themselves
- discovers genitals (private parts) and the pleasure they give
- can imagine and fantasize. Is not sure what is real and what is imaginary; e.g. your child can be frightened of monsters under the bed.
- learns to label feelings, e.g. "I sad" or "I mad" by 3 years



## What parents can do to help

- Try to understand how your toddler feels.
- Develop a partnership with your child. A certain amount of give and take is helpful, but it is important for the child to know that the parent is in charge. Be consistent. Don't give in just because your toddler is angry or keeps asking.
- Make the most of your child's growing desire to please you by helping your child learn to co-operate with others, e.g. learning to take turns – sharing a favourite toy or waiting for your help with zipping up their coat.
- Understand your child's development and what is fair to expect; e.g. a child of 2 can choose one of two things to wear, but can't be expected to sit quietly.

## When to be concerned

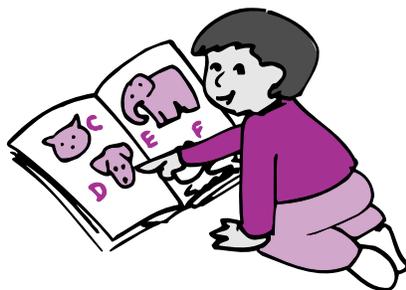
- Your child doesn't accept physical attention from you, e.g. hugs and cuddles.
- Your child has temper tantrums 2 or 3 times a day and/or you have difficulty dealing with their tantrums.
- Your child is constantly playing with his or her genitals in public.
- Separation anxiety continues for more than 3 months.

## LISTENING AND TALKING

Children's listening and talking skills tell us about their ability to think and reason.

### a) Understanding language

- understands more words than they use and can point to many pictures when asked
- can follow simple directions (e.g. "Give it to Mommy.")
- by age 2, can recognize names of familiar people, objects, and some body parts
- by age 3, your child understands most of what you say
- enjoys looking at and talking about picture books with adults



- listens to a story book for 5 to 10 minutes
- memory is developing; can remember something that happened yesterday

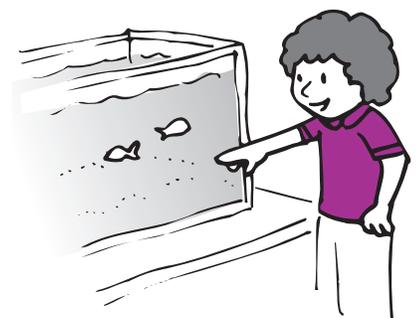
### b) Speaking

- enjoys naming objects, and loves to learn new words
- vocabulary increases rapidly
- at age 2, uses 2-4 word phrases and sentences
- talks to self; asserts self with "no" or "mine"
- by age 3, can say more than 1,000 words, and begins to use pronouns (I, you, me, we, they) and some plurals (cars, dogs, cats)
- can count to two; understands the idea of one, many, more
- refers to self by name; and by age 3, knows whether they are a boy or girl
- by age 3, can be understood most of the time, rarely leaves out consonants at the beginning or end of words



### c) The 3-year old child may still:

- pronounce some words incorrectly.
- say some sounds incorrectly (e.g. 'S', 'L', 'R', 'CH', 'TH', 'SH').
- repeat sounds and/or words (e.g. I want–want–some juice).



## What parents can do to help

- Get down to the child's own level when communicating.
- Spend time talking while doing things with your child.
- Use books, stories and nursery rhymes to help the child learn new words. Make up your own stories and songs.
- Listen and allow your child time to finish speaking. Repeat words and phrases correctly instead of correcting your child.
- Set up situations where your child needs to use words (e.g. give children only one shoe so they have to ask for the other).
- Expand your child's sentences (e.g. Child: "Look cat" Parent: "Yes a cat. The cat is climbing.")
- Use open-ended questions (e.g. "What do you think will happen next?").
- Avoid asking too many questions. Questioning can put pressure on the child.
- Limit TV watching to one hour per day.
- Speak to your child in the language you know best.



## When to be concerned

- Your 2-year old is not talking.
- Your 3-year old does not use 3-word sentences often.
- Your 3-year old cannot be understood.
- Your child seems not to understand language and cannot follow directions.
- Your child appears not to hear and responds to people only when he or she can see them face to face.

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**Other information on parenting  
are available at your local  
Community Health Office/Centre  
or online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca>**

For more information, contact:

A public health nurse at  
Vancouver Coastal Health,  
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