University of Wisconsin-Extension ■ Cooperative Extension ■ B3791

Parenting the Second and Third Years

MONTHS

27-28

Toddler years are busy years.

No one needs to tell you that the toddler years are busy years. They are busy for your toddler, who is into everything, and busy for you, because you have to chase, protect, and teach her.

With all this activity and stress, it may be hard to remember that these first 3 years are probably the most important time in your child's life. You have the chance now to help her become a healthy, responsible, loving, and accomplished person.

Try to enjoy these busy, important years. Be good to yourself. Take time out when you can and share child care with others when you need a break. Enjoy your child's growth and celebrate her new skills with her. Reward yourself, too, for your successes. And don't be hard on yourself for mistakes. All parents make them.

Believe it or not, when these busy toddler years pass, you will probably look back on this time with pleasure. For now, do all you can to make the most of these important years.

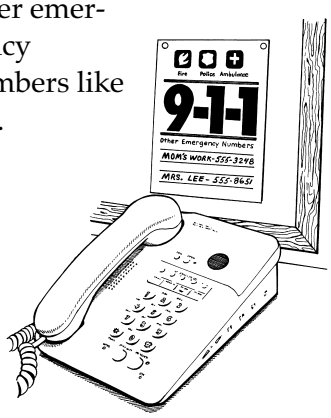
Re-check safety.

Give your house a safety re-check today. Children can get into new dangers as they develop new abilities. Cover electrical outlets. Make sure everything dangerous is locked up or out of reach.

As toddlers learn to climb, they can open cabinets that they could not reach before. They can also climb up bookshelves and tip them over. You can make bookshelves safer by attaching them to the wall.

Each home is different. Parents can make their load easier if they stay alert to changing safety risks, and take action as soon as new ones are found.

Keep by each phone the numbers for the nearest Poison Control Center, your doctor, and other emergency numbers like 911.



Turn win-lose into win-win.

Your toddler's growing independence may be a big source of stress in your life right now. Sometimes, you may feel like you're in a war with your child, trying to win every battle. Some battles end so that you both lose. When you win, your child might fight back even harder. When she wins, you might feel angry, defeated, or guilty.

One way to reduce this stress is to handle these battles so **both of you win at least a little**. Maybe you can't talk about compromise with a stubborn 2-year-old. But you can figure out how to end up with no one feeling like a loser. If you refuse to get caught up in a battle, then your child can't lose — and neither can you.

For example, your daughter demands that you read her a story, and you want her to help pick up her toys. Maybe she can pick out the story before cleanup, and you can read it when the room is picked up. Or, maybe you can read half the story before cleanup, and read the rest after. You'll both feel better for it.

When there's never enough time

Stress can be caused by feeling that you have too much to do and not enough time. You can't even get all your chores done, much less play with your child or take time for yourself.

Managing your time better can help prevent this kind of stress. Here are some ideas:

- **Make a list** of everything you want to get done for 1 day or 1 week. Decide which things are most important and which ones can wait or don't have to be done at all. Be reasonable about the number of things you can do in the time you have.
- **Write out a schedule** for your day, so you can aim for a time to finish each task. Think about how you'll do the task in the time you've planned.
- **Group chores** together if they need similar tools. Group all the chores that involve going out or the ones for which you need someone else to care for your child.
- **Figure out how much you really can do** in the time you have.

Don't be afraid to say "no" to people who want more of your time than you want to give. Make sure you build in time for the most important people in your life!

TV tells toddlers about cereals.

Has this happened to you yet? You are pushing your grocery cart down the aisle at the market. Your toddler sees a certain brand of breakfast cereal. He begins calling out the name of the cereal. He wants you to buy it. You are amazed. You've never bought that kind of cereal, and he's never eaten it. How did he find out about it?

Probably from TV. Toddlers don't **seem** to pay much attention to television, but are often aware of what is happening on the screen. Commercials are very appealing because of the action and noise. One food advertised a lot during children's programs is cereal. Some of these cereals are nutritious, but others are not. In fact, some of these cereals have more sugar than three chocolate chip cookies or as much as a donut. They are more like special treats than breakfast food.

How can you tell if a cereal is high in sugar? Look for the ingredient label on the box. Ingredients are listed in order of quantity, starting with the most. If the first or second ingredient listed is **sugar*, sucrose,** or **corn syrup**, there is a lot of sugar in the cereal. You will want to choose another cereal lower in sugar.

What do you tell your child if you decide not to buy the cereal? Say: "This is not an everyday food. We want to buy a cereal that will help you grow healthy and strong." Check labels on other cereals, and let him choose from the cereals that are low in sugar.

If your child is unhappy because you aren't going to buy the cereal he wants, move away from the cereal display. Go on and do the rest of your shopping. You can spend time reading cereal labels when you are shopping alone.

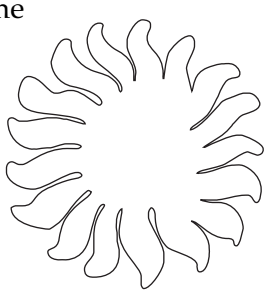
Other names for sugar include: corn sweetener, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, molasses, and honey.

Bedtime is not always sleep time.

Q. My 2½-year-old won't go to sleep when I put him to bed. What can I do?

A. Bedtime is not always sleep time.

Young children need regular bedtimes, and special **bedtime routines** — like teeth brushing, stories, and hugs. Parents need regular bedtimes for their children, so they can have some time alone.



You can expect your child to go to bed and be quiet at set times. Don't worry if he does not always go to sleep as soon as he goes to bed. When he isn't sleepy, let him have some quiet time in bed looking at books until sleep comes.

Change can be hard.

Some children adjust easily to changes in routine or plans. Others adapt more slowly.

Parents may expect children to have difficulty with big changes, like moving to a new house or getting a new baby brother. But even small changes, like transitions (shifts from one activity to another) or changes in plans, can be challenging.

For example, you ask your toddler to come to dinner now. He says, "No!" This really means, "I can't change activities that quickly." He needs time to switch from playing to eating.

Here are some ways to help your child handle change:

- **Tell your child about changes ahead of time,** but not too far ahead.
- **Provide transition time between activities.** For example, give your child 10-minute and 5-minute warnings before he needs to stop playing and have dinner. A timer works great!
- **Stick to daily routines.** This helps your child know what to expect, so he feels more secure.
- **Offer choices.** This lets your child have some control, which reduces the number of changes he must adjust to.
- **Set clear, consistent limits.** Slow adapting children test limits often, to check if they've changed.
- **Make sure your child gets enough sleep.** A tired child has a harder time handling changes.

Preparing your toddler for special occasions

Parents are often eager to have their children join in the fun of celebrations. For the young child, these occasions may be happy, or they may be scary and upsetting. Your young child may not want to talk to a strange Santa Claus or shake hands with a clown. He will probably not laugh if a neighbor child in a witch costume swoops down upon him. He might not enjoy meeting new relatives at a family gathering, either.

You can't protect your child from every frightening situation. But here are a few things you **can** do to prepare him for special occasions:

- **Talk to your child** about where you are planning to go. Tell him what he will see and do there.
- **Practice ahead of time**, if you can. Show your toddler pictures of Santa before visiting him. Let him play with masks before Halloween. Before the family party, show him photos and tell him about the relatives he may see.
- **Watch with your child from a safe distance** before entering a gathering. Let him watch other children meeting Santa or a clown and reassure him with hugs and words.

Then, let your child take his time getting acquainted, and let **him** decide whether to participate. Don't force him to get close to unfamiliar or scary people or characters.

Games for growing

SORTING GAME

Help your child learn how things can be **alike** or **different**.

How to play

Find three or four each of about four different things, like four playing cards, four ribbons, four spoons, and four leaves. Mix these up, and put them in a pile or a bowl.

Ask your child to sort them into piles of things that are **alike**. If your child wants, you can take a turn at sorting, too. To make the game harder, you can make all the things almost alike, such as four small paper squares, four medium-sized paper squares, and four large paper squares.

Remember: Play this and any game only as long as it's fun for your child and for you.

FIRST NUMBERS

Help your child learn the difference between **one** and **two**.

How to play

Show your child groups of things that have one, two, three, or more in them.

You can use small toys, books, paper cups, flowers, milk caps, or other small, safe things for this game. Encourage her to pick out the group that is **one**. Put two objects together and ask her how many. Put one object out and ask her how many. Then let her ask you.

Playing make-believe

Imagination is a wonderful thing. We can help our children develop it. Children love to pretend they are someone important and powerful, like a super hero, doctor, teacher, or parent.

This is a good, healthy part of growing up. It helps children practice for the future. It gives them pleasure and comfort.

Dr. Burton White found in his studies that well-developed young children often pretended they were someone else — usually an adult. He also found that most of these children had received a lot of encouragement from their parents to do fantasy play.

Join your child in fantasy play. You will make this important play even more special for your toddler and encourage her creativity.

Left- or right-handed?

Most children change hand preference several times before settling down to a left or right hand preference. Some continue to have equal skill in both hands throughout their lives.

Hand preference is already present in the child's brain at birth. If your child shows a preference for left-handedness, don't try to force her to change. Pressure to change may confuse her and affect her self-confidence and learning. If your child is left-handed, she won't be alone. Fifteen percent of the U.S. population is left-handed.

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