University of Wisconsin-Extension ■ Cooperative Extension ■ B3791

Parenting the Second and Third Years

MONTHS 29-30

Your toddler is learning new words.

Isn't it amazing how fast your toddler is learning new words? Learning language may be your child's most important new skill this year. You are helping. Every time you sing him a song or say a nursery rhyme, your toddler learns about language and learns that you enjoy language.

In their eagerness to help their children learn language, some parents forget that language goes two ways. Children must hear people use language. But they also need adults to listen and respond to their words.

Let your child tell you stories, "read" books to you, describe things she has seen, and answer your questions. Help him make up songs. Encourage him to play at rhyming words or making up new words.

Children who know more words and use more complex sentences have parents who elaborate on the child's words. When she says, "Cow," you can elaborate by saying: "Yes, it's a black and white Holstein cow, and she is eating grass."

Show your child that what he says is important to you. **Remember**: Communication means talking **and** listening.

Helping children cooperate

How can parents help their children grow to be cooperative and well-behaved? Research psychologist Dr. Diana Baumrind has studied this question.

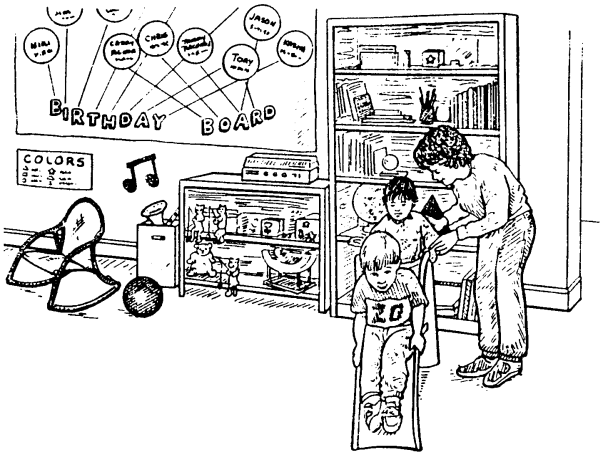
Her research shows that children who are **most cooperative** have parents who:

- are **warm** and **loving**,
- have **clear, consistent rules**,
- **explain the reasons for their rules,** and
- **demand reasonably mature behavior.**

Dr. Baumrind found that this kind of guidance was more effective than parenting that is too bossy and rigid or too passive and weak.

Toddlers learn in lots of ways.

- **Let me use a sprinkler can** or squeeze bottle to water outdoor plants. Think of other ways I could help outside.
- **Give me my own flashlight**. I'll enjoy turning it on, because I can push the switch with my thumb. I probably can't pull it back. Show me how to turn the flashlight around, so I can push the switch off.
- **Take pictures of special times**, and write the date on the back of the pictures. Even if you don't have a baby book for me, I will like looking at these pictures now and when I'm older.
- **Turn off the radio and television.** Listen with me to sounds around the house, like running water, the refrigerator motor, a ticking clock, or a wind chime. Tell me what the sounds are. Helping me learn to listen will help me learn language.



Good times at mealtimes

Mealtime is not just time to eat. It can be a time to talk, share, and enjoy being with others. Research shows that families who eat together frequently have children who do better in school and develop more positive behavior patterns. Family members can discuss what has been happening at school, work, or home. Even though your toddler may not talk well, let him take part. Ask him questions, and let him answer. Make sure the TV is off, as it can be very distracting for your child.

Meal time is **not** a good time to discuss family problems about money, misbehavior, and the like. No one feels like eating when there is an argument going on. If this happens often, your child will begin to dread meals. He will eat as quickly as possible, and then want to leave the table. He may begin to have stomach aches because mealtime is unpleasant.

During meals, think of things to talk about that will help everyone feel good about themselves and others. Talk about problems **after** the meal is over.

If you are eating alone with your child, you can talk about the names of the foods on his plate, and the color and shape of each food. You can count how many foods there are on his plate. With a little imagination and planning, you and your toddler can make every meal a happy time.

Why do my kids fight all the time?

As you know, when your toddler begins to get into things, you have to pay more attention to her. When this happens, her older brother may feel you love him less.

To make things worse, your daughter can break and take away her older brother's toys. Let your older child know you understand and sympathize with his feelings. Suggest ways he can cope with his little sister without hurting her. For example: "See, you have a book to look at, too. Here is **your** book, Annie."

What to do

There is a difference between **angry feelings** — which are OK — and **hurtful actions** — which are **not OK**. Keep your children from hurting each other or each other's things. It does no good to make your older child feel guilty for feeling angry. After all, his feelings are normal and understandable. Tell him you will not let him hurt his sister, or let his little sister hurt him.

Here are some other ideas that can help:

- **Plan some special time each day for each child.** Even 15 minutes of your undivided attention can help. All children need to be shown this special love and care.
- **Show you understand what each child is feeling.** Say things like: "It really makes you angry when your sister gets into your things." Help each child see how his or her behavior affects the other one.
- **Make life easier for your older child**. Don't heap praise on his little sister when he is there. Ask your friends and relatives to follow this advice, too.
- **Try to be realistic about what your older child can do.** You might be tempted to ask more from him at this time. You might expect him to be more responsible, patient, unselfish, and grown-up than he can be at his age.
- **Protect his special toys.** If he has one or two special toys he doesn't want to share with little sister, suggest a place he can keep them where she cannot reach.

When your children are fighting, don't try to decide which one is to blame. Keep them apart for a little while. If they are fighting over a toy, take the toy away from both of them. Then help them find something else to do.

Choosing a preschool

Consider these questions in choosing a preschool:

- ❤ Are you invited to watch in the classroom? Spending an hour or 2 observing will show the school's offerings.
- ❤ Are the teachers willing to answer your questions? Are you welcome to visit and observe at any time? You and your child's teachers and caregivers need to work together to help your child grow.
- ❤ Do teachers seem to enjoy and respect the children? Is there hugging and warmth between the teachers and the children?
- ❤ Are there enough adults to provide good supervision and attention? Children's relationships with caregivers are important.
- ❤ Do the children seem happily involved in activities?
- ❤ Is there a balance of quiet and active play? Of indoor and outdoor play? Children need variety in their daily lives.
- ❤ Do teachers provide plenty of transition time between activities? Some children need time to adjust to changes in activities. Is there a consistent routine each day, but also some free time? Routines help children know what to expect, while free time gives them a chance to make choices.
- ❤ Does indoor play include music, art, water, dress-up, housekeeping, science, block building, books, and puzzles? Does it also include toys for imaginative play such as trucks, cars, and dolls? Are the rooms clean, safe, and attractive? Children need to have lots of different chances to learn.
- ❤ Is there a safe outdoor area with enough equipment, like ladders, barrels, low slides, riding toys, and swings to encourage activity and muscle development? Is there protection from the sun?
- ❤ Do you approve of the food they serve? Do adults eat with the children at lunch time?

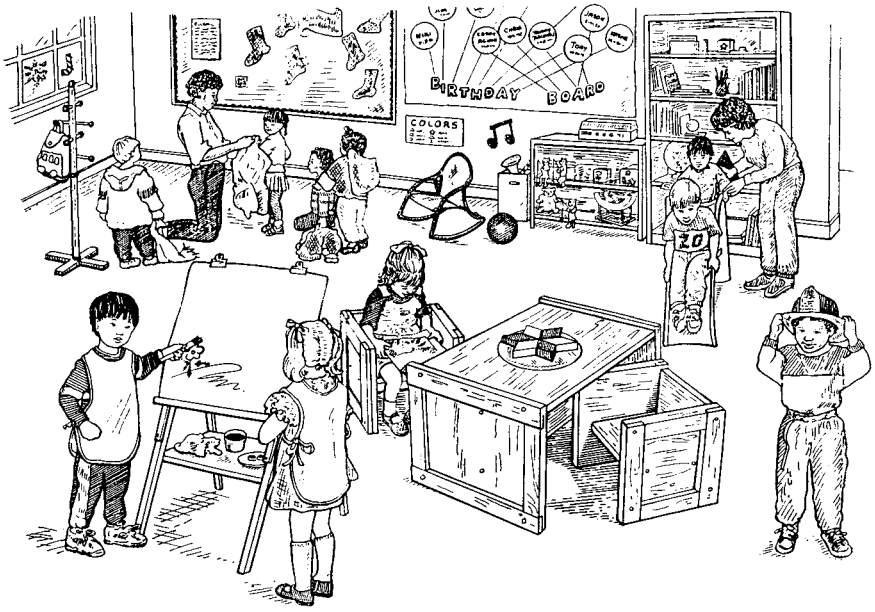
You will not be happy about your child's preschool unless you feel that your child is in a safe, healthy, nurturing place. The extra time it takes to find the right kind of care for your child will pay off in your own peace of mind and in your child's development.

Child care centers require immunizations.

If you are considering starting your child in a child care center, her immunizations (shots) must be up-to-date. You will need an **immunization record** that lists the dates of each immunization your child has had.

The law says that child care centers **must** make sure all children have their immunizations. This protects your child, as well as the other children at the center. The child care center staff must see your child's record, so they can complete official records for their files.

Your child's doctor or tribal maternal-child specialist will explain what is required and help you keep the necessary records. If you haven't followed the recommended schedule so far, your child's health care provider can help you "catch up" now.



Homemade toys that teach

MODELING DOUGH

Modeling dough helps your toddler **practice using his hands and fingers** and learn how to **mold different shapes** by patting, squeezing, and rolling.

Ingredients

2½ cups flour

½ cup salt

1 Tablespoon cream of tartar

3 Tablespoons cooking oil

Up to 2 cups boiling water

Food coloring

Makes 3 cups (recipe can be doubled).

Making modeling dough

While water is coming to a boil, mix flour, salt, and cream of tartar in a heat-safe bowl. Add oil to water. If you're only making one color, add the food coloring to the water as well. Otherwise, wait until the modeling dough has cooled to add colors.

When the water-oil mixture comes to a boil, pour it into the dry ingredients and stir to mix well. Make sure your child is not underfoot when you do this.

Cover the surface with plastic wrap and let cool to room temperature. Knead to mix ingredients. For several colors, separate and knead in food coloring. Store in an airtight container, like a plastic bag. The modeling dough may keep for several weeks.

Playing

Put the modeling dough on a plastic placemat and protect the floor from spills. Your toddler will enjoy having you near her when she plays with her modeling dough. You can give her ideas on how to squeeze, roll, and pinch the dough. Add cookie cutters, a dull butter knife, or small rolling pin to encourage your child's creativity. You might need to say: "This dough is for playing, not for eating."

Store the modeling dough when children have runny noses. They can spread their illness to others too easily through shared dough.

BREAD DOUGH CREATIONS

Your 2-year-old has learned to roll, pinch, poke, and mash bits of modeling dough with you. So why not make some creative snacks together? Use this recipe for a dough that your child can mold, cook, and eat.

Ingredients

2 cups flour

3 Tablespoons cooking oil

½ cup water

½ teaspoon salt

Making bread dough

Show your toddler how you both wash your hands before cooking. Measure the flour and salt into a large bowl. Add the oil and rub it in until the mixture is like coarse oatmeal. Add the water and blend with your fingers. Add more water if necessary to make a dough you can gather into a ball. Knead the dough for 10 minutes. Your toddler will enjoy punching and rolling the dough.

Playing

Divide the dough into small balls, and let your child create! Show her how to flatten it, cut holes with a table knife (help her with this so she doesn't cut herself), pinch up peaks, and stretch the dough.

When she's all done, you can place her creations on a cookie sheet. Bake them in a 350° F oven for 10 minutes. Place on a rack to cool. When they're cool, enjoy showing off the creations, and eating them!

Games for growing

FOLLOW ME!

Encourage your child's **imagination** and **physical development**.

How to play

This is a follow-the-leader game to play indoors or outdoors.

- ❤ Show your toddler funny ways you can move and encourage her to imitate, following after you. Run fast, walk slow, gallop like a horse, shuffle like an elephant, or flap like a duck.
- ❤ Take turns leading.

Use your imagination! And encourage her imagination, as you both think of more and more different and funny ways to play.

WHAT'S IT FOR?

Help your child **understand** how things are used. This game also helps build your child's **imagination** and **language skills**.

Materials

Collect about ten things that your child uses or has seen used, such as a shoe lace, a fork, a napkin, a comb, a key, eyeglasses, a spool of thread, a hammer, a paint brush, and a pencil.

How to play

- ❤ Pick up one item at a time and ask what it is used for.
- ❤ Give your child a turn to ask you what things are used for.

You can play a silly version of this game, too, by asking a silly question about each thing you pick up. For example, pick up a cup, and ask if that is what you brush your teeth with.

DRAWING AROUND THINGS

Let your child practice using **small hand muscles** and help him understand more about the **shapes** of things.

Materials

- ❤ **Differently shaped objects** — plastic cup, block, triangle, and so on
- ❤ **Stiff paper** or **paper pad**
- ❤ **Pencil** or **crayon**

How to play

- ❤ Sit in a comfortable place and give your child a plastic cup to draw around.
- ❤ First, have him trace the edge of the cup with his finger. Then give him a pencil or crayon to use for drawing around the cup. Talk about the **circle** he drew.
- ❤ Help him find some other things with simple shapes to trace. He can trace around his hand or foot, or yours. He'll enjoy this. You're helping him use his hands and make pictures of objects, so he'll learn more about the ways things are different.

Remember: Play this or any game only as long as it is fun for both of you.

Books on child guidance

A Very Practical Guide to Discipline with Young Children by G. Mitchell (New York: Telshare Publishing), 1998. Offers practical suggestions for managing problems such as jealousy, dressing, and temper tantrums.

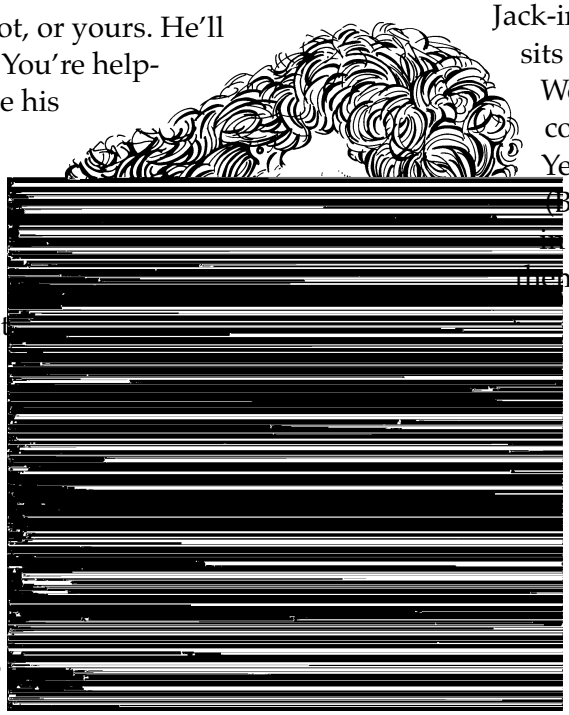
Kids, Parents, and Power Struggles by M. S. Kurcinka (New York: Quill), 2001. Ideas for coping with challenging behavior that takes into account children's temperament.

Finger play

Help children develop **small hand muscles** and **listening skills**.

Little Rabbit

Run, little rabbit;
climb up here.
He is so hungry,
he nibbles my ear.
(Make fingers run up arm and gently pinch your ear).

Jack-in-the-box

Jack-in-the-box
sits so still.
Won't you
come out?
Yes, I will.
(Bury thumbs in fist, then pop them out.)