



Toddler Development Stage

Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.

Please note: Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

Physical Development

Toddlers are going through unique physical changes, and you will see them acquire many new skills during this period, such as the ability to:

- Show curiosity about their body parts and ask questions about them (don’t be afraid to answer)
- Walk (forward and backward, run, and jump)
- Climb up and down stairs (one foot at a time for quite a while)
- Pedal a tricycle (by the end of the toddler years)
- Kick a ball and throw a toy (most likely not overhand)
- Feed themselves and drink from a cup (but expect accidental spills)
- Turn pages in a picture book
- Begin to develop hand and foot preference

Your child is not just growing bigger and stronger. Toddlers are learning about the world and the people in it. By interacting with your child and providing a healthy home environment, you are helping your child learn. Consider the many new skills your toddler develops during this time period:

Emotions

- Display new feelings: pride, love, jealousy, shame, and doubt
- Can get frustrated easily but prefer to do things without help
- May have rapid and frequent mood swings from happy to sad, and back to happy again, sometimes over seemingly minor triggers
- Tend to see things only from their own point of view

Speech

- Learn many new words
- Understand more words than they can actually speak
- Put two- to three-word sentences together by around age 2
- Imitate sounds or words and memorize short sayings, songs, rhymes, or sections from books



Play

- Enjoy playing near other children but not necessarily with other children (usually not too good at sharing)
- Use imagination during games (your child can become confused about what is real and not real)
- Engage in pretend play with simple themes
- Enjoy doing the same thing over and over again during play, such as singing the same song and reading the same book
- Start to understand basic rules and directions and respond to simple rewards and consequences

Interacting with Parents/Adults

- Show independence by saying — NO to parents, or doing the opposite of what the parent asks
- Want to help and imitate adults

Behaviors

- Physically identify what they want and enjoy having choices
- Desire predictable routines, such as bedtime routines
- Start being interested in toilet training (but this is often not accomplished until 3-4 years old)
- Throw tantrums (this is a normal part of development!)

A note about boys and girls: Although every child is unique, in general boys and girls develop at different rates. You may notice differences between your children, and understanding these gender differences can be useful. For example:

- Girls usually develop the skills and abilities described in this section slightly before/earlier than boys.
- Boys are generally more active and aggressive than girls. They are more willing to take risks and explore new things.
- Girls tend to use words and speak more than boys.

Citation: Sherman, M.D., Bowling, U., & Anderson, J., & Wyche, K. (2011). Veteran Parenting Toolkit. South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Oklahoma City, OK. www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting