

## Parenting Toddlers



Whilst your toddler is going through major brain changes which will help them in the future they will need to learn to wait, take turns, sometimes accept that they can't have or do something. Whilst they are learning it will take a lot of patience, time, repetition and energy to help them get it right.

### **Safety First**

As parents and carers, our first job is to keep them safe. Always keep that in mind when you are teaching them - and sometimes you will be able to explain why they can't do something. 'You need to hold my hand near the road so I can keep you safe' etc.

### **What is normal?**

We don't like to use the term 'normal' as what is normal for one family may be very different for another. However, these are some of the things you can expect from a two-year-old:

- Are learning to be independent but get frustrated easily
- Are possessive (they think they are the centre of the universe)
- Are noisy
- Can't sit still for long
- May stop sleeping during the day, but will often be tired early evening
- Have a short memory
- Play beside other children, not with them
- Have tantrums
- May go through another stage of separation anxiety

## 1. Tantrums and Emotional Overload!



With your help, you will help your toddler make new connections in their brain. When we are born we react primarily to the front part of our brain. This is necessary for survival, to help us get food etc. when we can't do it for ourselves.

As we mature we need to learn to connect to the part of our brain which will help us learn empathy, wait patiently, understand the world from another point of view, deal with angry feelings without lashing out to others etc.

### How you can support them: Ways to avoid emotional overload

1. **Distract** your toddler before they get too distressed. "Look at that tree, cat, flower etc."
2. **Give choices.** People feel frustrated when they feel powerless. Giving two options gives them power. For example, a child who refuses to get dressed, ask them "Would you like to wear your red jumper or your blue coat?" It is important to stick to two (or three) choices at the most, so they don't feel overwhelmed.
3. **Create a calm area in the house.** A small pop up tent with pillows and blankets can be a great place for your toddler to calm down and reset. Somewhere with limited stimulation and where it is quiet and not too bright.
4. Use **mood bottles** to help them concentrate onto one thing - almost like a meditation.

## 2. Needs - Fill *your* jug first



To be able to look after your children you need to look after yourself. Remember the age old saying 'You can't pour from an empty jug'?

Well this applies to *you* too. If you ever listen to the emergency announcements before take-off, on a flight on an aeroplane, you will notice they ask you to put your own oxygen mask on first. Have you ever wondered why this is?

### **How you can support them**

If you look after yourself *first* you will be in a much stronger position to help many others around you. Some people may think this is selfish but actually the opposite may be true.

### **What can you do for yourself to fill your jug?**

Give yourself permission to take care of YOU too: Take a warm bath, go for walk, talk to a friend, read a magazine, sit and drink a coffee, meditate, go for a run etc.

[More can be found here: https://www.sharingparenting.com/2022/03/08/filling-your-jug-taking-care-of-you/](https://www.sharingparenting.com/2022/03/08/filling-your-jug-taking-care-of-you/)

### 3. Need behind the behaviour - Maslow's hierarchy of need



When we see challenging behaviour, we need to think about what the *reason* is for the behaviour. Often when we see challenging behaviour is it to satisfy an unmet need.

Have you ever wondered why you can't concentrate on anything when you are hungry or tired?

Maslow's theories are shown on a triangle. He said unless the NEEDS at the bottom are addressed you cannot move up the triangle.

This would explain why children are often moody when they come out of school – they are tired and need feeding! I had a friend who greeted her twins with a banana each when she picked them up from school – she knew what they needed and how to avoid challenging behaviour on the way home!

This is also why it may take a while for children (and adults) to settle in to a new house, group or job.

At first, they may feel unsafe with the unknown or unfamiliar or that they don't belong – once they start making friends and getting to know a new space, just watch them thrive.

#### **How you can support them**

When you see challenging behaviour - **stop and think** - where are they on Maslow's triangle?

Start at the bottom and work up.

4. Needs - behaviour has a purpose.



It is important to share the people behind the research before we begin.

Alfred Adler (1870-1937), was an Austrian psychotherapist working in Vienna at the same time as Freud. He was one of the first psychotherapists who was interested in the relationship between parents and their children and individuals and society.

Adler recognised that every *action* of a child has a *purpose* and that the child's basic aim is:

- to have significance,
- to feel they belong and
- have a place in their social group.

He concluded that a child who is misbehaving is trying, in their own way, to get their needs met, to find their place and to feel important in their own world.

Adler identified four goals of misbehaviour:

1. **Attention seeking**
2. **Power seeking**
3. **Revenge seeking**
4. **Giving up**

Betty-Lou Bettner and Amy Lew are American psychologists who practise, teach and write using Adlerian principles and came up with the idea of the CRUCIAL C's to help parents to understand and remember the goals of misbehaviour.

**The Crucial C's are**

1. **Connect** – I need to believe I belong
2. **Capable** – I need to believe I can do it
3. **Count** – I need to believe I can make a difference
4. **Courage** – I need to believe I can handle what comes

### How you can support them

The best way to work out what your child needs by their behaviour, is to ask yourself how their behaviour makes *you* feel?!

#### CONNECT

When *you* are feeling **irritated** by your child it is usually because they are looking for your **attention** because they need to **connect**.

Even though you may not be able to give it right away (and you do not want to reward negative behaviour), make a note that they are asking for someone to one time and plan it as soon as possible.

#### CAPABLE

If *you* feel **angry** or feel like you are getting into a **power struggle** with your child it's usually because they don't feel **capable** of doing something.

Give them choices (and get out of the ring) and plan some time to actively listen to them.

#### COUNT

If *you* feel **hurt** by something your child has said (or keeps saying) it may be because they don't feel they **count** (or valued) in some way.

Tell them what you really like about them and be specific about positive behaviours. Actively listen them and include them in family decisions – for example, let them choose a meal or dessert for the family each week.

#### Encourage

If *you* feel like **giving up**, it is likely your child feels like **giving up** too 😞

Give them COURAGE. Start small and build on the positives.

Encouraging words and actions during the process will have a big effect on your child's self esteem and their motivation to carry on or have the courage to start something new.

Learning to have a go even if they do not always succeed (or be the best) at something are good skills for life.

Focus on the *effort* that your child is putting into something (however small rather) than the end result.

HOW DO I FEEL?	WHAT'S THE GOAL?	WHY?	STRATEGIES
Irritated	Attention	Needs to feel <b>C</b> onnected	Plan 1 to 1 time
Angry	Power	Needs to feel <b>C</b> apable	Give choices
Hurt	Revenge	Needs to feel they <b>C</b> ount	Actively listen Tell them you love them
Giving up	Giving up	Needs to believe they have the <b>C</b> ourage	Set small goals Encourage

## 5. Active Listening



**Research tells us there is a link between active listening and self-esteem.** We aren't taught to listen, we 'just do it'. Some people are better than others. Sometimes as parents, things get in the way and we can be distracted when our children are trying to talk to us.

**Listening does not mean fixing, it means supporting our children to work things out.**

Encourage them and build their self-esteem.

There are 2 levels of listening:

1. **What the words are telling you**  
and
2. **What your child is feeling. It is important to hear on both levels.**

How you can support them: How to Actively listen:

### **Use open body language**

What does this mean? (I'll give you a clue – the OPPOSITE of someone on their phone!)

Think about someone you like to talk to – someone who is there for you.

Are they looking at you? is their body facing you? are they nodding (and really listening) to what to what you are saying?

Do they ask open questions like 'How do you feel?', 'What do think about that?' etc. rather than talking about themselves.

If you can do this for your children you will keep the communication open between the two of you – and help them to problem solve.



Other helpful tips

- Make a conscious decision to listen
- Switch off your own agenda
- Ask open questions (who, what, where, when, how)
- Think of your body language – open posture, nodding, facing child, eye contact when you can.
- Resist giving advice. Remember – you’re not fixing.
- Listen for their feelings (e.g. it sounds like you’re really angry)
- If it isn’t an appropriate time for you to listen, make an arrangement with your child to find a suitable time. Make sure you stick to it.
- Think about how it feels when you are not listened to compared to how you feel when you are being listened to.
- Mirror good listening to show your children how to become good listeners.

6. **The best thing you can spend on your children is time**



90% of the growth of the human brain occurs in the first 5 years of life. So, the time we spend sharing and responding positively to our young children will forge connections between the brain cells. These connections help our children cope well with stress and emotional situations later in life.

## 7. Don't say don't



Try this simple but effective positive parenting strategy to turn around challenging behaviour. This one's called **'don't say don't'** and has been really helpful parents.

If I say to you "don't think of a rabbit, don't think of its big ears, don't think of its fluffy tail and please don't think of a *white* rabbit"

What do you think of? ..... a rabbit exactly! It's really hard not to – it's just how our brains work. If we say *don't* it almost visualises that. Don't becomes silent and you hear the *do* at the end.

When you're speaking to children if you think about the **last two words** that you're saying, those are the words that they're most likely to hear and act on.



Also, are when we say those two words our brains will kind of form a visual image of that, so if it's negative then they form the visual image of the negative.

If we say "don't hit me" they're likely to hit you because they just hear "hit you" or if you say "don't bite" then they just hear "bite"!

### How you can support them

Instead of "don't bite" you could say "**stroke my arm**" or "**let's look at this ...**" or "**just take a moment, take a breath**" and things like that so they hear the positive way. Just try to be really positive about it and if you hear yourself saying don't, it's fine, just **follow up with the positive**.

## 8. Labelling



Do you have a little queen or princess at home? Or maybe a little monkey!

If you have felt a connection from a relative who has also ways had a nickname for you then this can be a positive thing. However, labels can be restrictive (even if you don't mean them to be).

For example, does a little princess feel permission to climb trees, play with mud, join in with the games at Forest school or messy play? Does the little monkey sometimes want to be recognised for sitting still, concentrating, reading a book or playing quietly?

**With a label it is easy for them and others to make assumptions about the person we are labelling.**

Remember also if we are given a label it is sometimes easier to live up to it. That's often why 'naughty children' just carry on with naughty ways – they have been given permission without you realising it.

How you can support them: So, what can you do instead?

**It is always better to describe the 'behaviour' not the person (or the deed not the doer).**

E.g.: That was a 'naughty thing' is better than *you* are naughty. Or she enjoys playing football rather than 'she's the sporty one'. This then opens the options for children to explore – the girl who enjoys football might want to try her hand at art or the boy who is often quiet might want to join in with a noisy activity and this can support them to do so.

## 9. Schemas



Have you noticed your child obsessing over wheels or running in circles one week and then lining up their cars the next? This may be because of a schema.

Schemas are a form of repetitive play children are driven to engage, which helps their cognitive development. This type of play can seem unusual to adults but is seen consistently with children at certain stages of their development.

At a year, children will often try putting objects inside other objects, even get inside them themselves (or try to). These schemas seem to help them make sense of the world.

### **How you can support them**

Allow your children to experiment and play repetitively.

Learn more about Schemas so you can recognise and support them.

[To learn more about the types of schemas follow the link below:](http://www.flyingstart.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Schema.pdf)  
[www.flyingstart.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Schema.pdf](http://www.flyingstart.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Schema.pdf)

## 10. Child-led play



Research has shown that adults who can play with their child for at least 15 minutes and day benefit by:

- Enjoying their child more
- Can settle difficult behaviours
- Helps stimulates creativity and imagination
- Their child can play better on their own at other times
- Can help child sleep better

### What is child led play?

This means letting your child *lead* the play.

The adult can *state* what they *see* but does not ask lots of questions.

Adult sits at the child's level or on the floor with no other distractions (turn the phone and TV off!)

Adult focuses only on the child - one activity only.

Watch the clip below to find out more: <http://vimeo.com/6016065>

### How?

1. Choose a toy or special box of toys for your child to play with.
2. Plan a quiet time of the day when you or your child is not tired or hungry or you will be interrupted.
3. Turn off the TV, phones and computers.
4. Set a timer for 15 minutes.
5. Sit on the floor or at your child's level.
6. Watch and listen - name if you want to ' you have picked up a red car and now a blue car'.

## In Summary



### **How you can support your toddler**

- Expect challenging behaviours and plan for them - have toys to distract them (especially when out), give choices, create calm areas in the house.
- Take time out for yourself when you can
- Offer food and drink regularly
- Be aware of your toddler's needs - if they are tired you should expect challenging behaviour
- Give them 1 to 1 time (even if it's 15 minutes a day)
- Encourage them 'That was a good thing you did'
- Listen to your child and let them lead the play
- Label the behaviour not the child. 'That wasn't a kind thing to do'
- Be aware of schemas and allow repetitive play.

More information, positive parenting strategies and downloads can be found at [www.sharingparenting.com](http://www.sharingparenting.com)

**If you are concerned about your toddler's behaviour speak to your GP or Health Visitor.**