

# 16 MONTHS



## Your Toddler...

- Is curious
- Walks up steps
- Climbs from one piece of furniture to another
- Rides little riding toys without pedals
- Builds a four-block tower
- Babbles with expressions; may use simple words
- Wants to do self-feeding with a cup and spoon at mealtime
- Pours water into different sizes of containers during bath time

## *As a toddler:*

*My family places me in my high chair at dinnertime. I enjoy the mealtime we have together. Last night, after a little while, I ran out of my favorite food - peaches. I was trying to get someone's attention by talking so they would give me more. No one seemed to understand what I was saying, so I threw my spoon. I thought they would understand that I wanted more peaches, but they became upset with me and told me to "stop." I began to cry and throw the other food off of my tray. It makes me angry when I try to ask for something and don't get it right away.*

*Learning new words is something that makes me happy. I understand many more words than I can say. Sometimes when I try to say a word, funny sounds come out of my mouth instead. My mom doesn't know what I mean when that happens. I am going to keep practicing my words so that everyone will soon be able to understand everything that I'm saying.*

*Now that I have gotten pretty good at walking around, I'm trying to climb on everything. My family doesn't allow me to climb on the stairs unless a big person is with me. I do get to climb up and down from the couch and chairs. I smile so proudly after I climb up on the furniture and sit down just like all the big people do.*

*My teacher and the other children at school are so fun to be around. I love playing and exploring with toys that are different than mine at home. When my dad drops me off in the mornings, though, I get upset and throw a tantrum because I want my dad to stay with me. My dad walks towards my teacher and tells me it's time for school and that he will be back. My teacher then lifts me up and gives me a big hug. She says, "I will keep you safe, and your dad will pick you up later today." I know that is true, but it is still sad for me to watch my dad leave. In just a few minutes, though, I relax my body and start exploring my class.*

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## *As a parent:*

*Well, so far, 16 months isn't any easier than 15 months. She is still clingy, and now she is more impatient and having more melt downs. Her separation anxiety is as bad as ever. It breaks my heart if she starts sobbing when I leave her with the sitter. The sitter even said my little one hit a child, and on another day, she bit a child. Why would she hurt another child? Is she acting out because I have to go to work and leave her? Am I not teaching her right from wrong? I feel so guilty.*

*At her 15-month checkup the pediatrician recommended I read about temperaments. He thought knowing more about her personality might make it easier for me to parent her. He said understanding her strengths and weaknesses would make me more effective in the way I relate to her and discipline her. I think he is right! I have been reading about the attributes of temperament in a book I checked out from the library. I am learning there are nine attributes to a person's temperament. My little girl is active, sensitive, "slow to warm up," regular or likes to be on a schedule, not very adaptable, easily distracted, intense in her reactions, and doesn't have a long attention span.*

*These are things I can help her work on, but also personality characteristics she will have to overcome or use to her advantage throughout her life. This is such an interesting topic; I think I'm even understanding my husband better! She has a lot of his attributes.*

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## Reflection

### TEMPER TANTRUMS

With your toddler's search for independence, come increasing temper tantrums. These are a normal part of his behavior. When you set a limit or make a suggestion or request, he may be triggered into a tantrum. Only your child can learn to contain and control his turmoil. It is not your fault, and it's not his fault. Your toddler is having a temper tantrum, and it is best for you to have as little involvement as possible in it. Try picking up your toddler, holding him quietly, or put him somewhere safe to "throw" his temper tantrum. Or walk out of sight until the tantrum lessens or has ended. When the tantrum has ended, your toddler will need reassurance and comfort about this inner turmoil he is learning to understand and control. You may want to comfort him by saying, "It's terrible being so upset, isn't it. I'm sorry I can't help you more. I love you, but controlling your temper is your job." At this point let it be over and done. Don't talk about it anymore, but rather move on to a new activity.

### COMMUNICATING WITH A TODDLER

Your toddler's speech and gestures are yet another way he communicates with you. He may have words for the objects and people in his daily life. He may even be able to put two words together, such as "all-gone." A word he will surely be using soon is "No!" You may notice frustration in your toddler when he is not able to get his message across to you. You may be able to understand his meaning by "listening to" his body language and considering his situation. He is sending you messages in many different ways, even if he doesn't have many words. Some of his behavior will ask you to set limits. His wonderful curiosity and exploring capabilities often take him beyond his limits. He "asks" for limits in different ways. He may reach for something forbidden, but will first look back to make sure you are watching. This is a clear signal to step in and say, "stop!" His behavior can also build up to an out-of-control cycle. As this cycle builds, he is asking you to step in and set a limit for him.

### SETTING LIMITS

Another message your toddler is sending is "Who is in control?" Setting limits teaches him that you are in control in a loving way. He doesn't need to understand and master everything just yet, because he has you. This is part of gaining control of himself and his independence. Because this can result in many daily confrontations and frustrations, setting limits and being in control need to be saved for the most important learning experiences. Crossing the street or climbing up to the medicine cabinet are not times when your toddler can be in control. However, when he pulls all of the socks out of the sock drawer, you might just take a deep breath and put them back. This may be one battle he wins!

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## TEMPERAMENT

Nine characteristics of temperament as identified by Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess:

1. the level and extent of motor activity
2. the rhythmicity, or degree of regularity, of functions such as eating, elimination and the cycle of sleeping and wakefulness
3. the response to a new object or person, in terms of whether the child accepts the new experience or withdraws from it
4. the adaptability of behavior to changes in the environment
5. the threshold, or sensitivity, stimuli
6. the intensity, or energy level, of response
7. the child's general mood or "disposition", whether cheerful or given to crying, pleasant or cranky, friendly or unfriendly
8. the degree of the child's distractibility from what he is doing
9. the span of the child's attention and his persistence in an activity



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### *Our Professional Opportunity...*

By now you probably have a good picture of the temperament of this child. His behavior at this age speaks clearly about those attributes he brought into the world with him.

You also know his parents well by now, and have a good sense of who they are in temperament, values and lifestyle.

So here is the question for you to consider at this point in your work with this family: What is their “goodness of fit?” Goodness of fit refers to the fact that certain combinations of parent and child temperaments may make their relationships easier or harder. For example, a child with an active temperament born to parents with quiet temperaments might drive his parents crazy. They may be exhausted by his activity. But that same child, born to parents with active temperaments, may fit right in to the family’s lifestyle.

Parents who are very outgoing and who adjust well to new situations may be frustrated by a child who is “slow to warm up.” But a parent who is somewhat reserved herself will identify with this same child and understand his need for time to adjust to new surroundings.

Sometimes, parents misread attributes of temperament in their children. If a child wants to keep building with blocks when a parent needs him to be ready to walk out the door, she may see his behavior as stubborn and oppositional. In fact, it may be that he has a long attention span and stays with a task until he is finished. He may also be a child who doesn’t transition quickly.

Seeing these attributes in her child as strengths rather than as behavior problems may give her some keys for working with him in the future in a more positive way. She may plan to get the blocks out only when they have a longer playtime. She may also learn that this little guy needs to be told in advance a few minutes before he has a change of activity coming.

At some point this month, ask the parent to tell you what she has learned about her child’s temperament. You could prompt her with questions about his activity level, his intensity, and whatever other questions you know might be pertinent to this family.

As she tells you about her child, listen for when she seems to be proud of the child’s attributes and when she seems concerned about them. Those areas of concern can almost provide a road map of where your work together might take you in the months to come.