

condone or bring attention to the behavior but should teach the child that it is more acceptable to perform the behavior in private.

Children in this age group are learning vocabulary associated with anatomy, elimination, and reproduction. Certain associations between words and functions become significant and can influence future sexual attitudes. For example, if parents refer to the genitalia as dirty, especially in the context of elimination, this association between “genitalia” and “dirty” may be transferred to sexual functions later in life. Sex-role differences become obvious to children and are evident in much of toddlers' imitative play. Although current research indicates that prenatal exposure to testosterone strongly influences the individual's gender identity, researchers also indicate that there are sensitive periods (e.g., puberty) that may also have an influence on the development of gender identity (Berenbaum and Beltz, 2011; Hines, 2011; Savic, Garcia-Falgueras, and Swaab, 2010). A sense of maleness or femaleness, or **gender identity**, begins by 24 months old when children are able to label their own and other's gender (Steensma, Kreukels, de Vries, et al, 2013). Early attitudes are formed about affectionate behaviors between adults from observing parental and other adult intimate or sensual activities. (See also Sex Education, Chapters 12 and 14.) The quality of relationships with parents is important to the child's capacity for sexual and emotional relationships later in life.

## Social Development

A major task of the toddler period is differentiation of the self from significant others, usually the mother. The differentiation process consists of two phases: **separation**, the children's emergence from a symbiotic fusion with the mother; and **individuation**, those achievements that mark children's expression of their individual characteristics in the environment. Although the process begins during the latter half of infancy, the major achievements occur during the toddler years.

Toddlers have an increased understanding and awareness of object permanence and some ability to withstand delayed gratification and tolerate moderate frustration. As a result, toddlers react differently to strangers than do infants. The appearance of