

## Preoperational Phase (PIAGET)

The period from 12 to 24 months old is a continuation of the final two stages of the sensorimotor phase. During this time, the cognitive processes develop rapidly and at times seem similar to those of mature thinking. However, reasoning skills are still primitive and need to be understood to effectively deal with the typical behaviors of a child of this age.

In the fifth stage of the sensorimotor phase, **tertiary circular reactions** (13 to 18 months old), the child uses active experimentation to achieve previously unattainable goals. Newly acquired physical skills are increasingly important for the function they serve rather than for the acts themselves. The child incorporates the old learning of secondary circular reactions with new skills and applies the combined knowledge to new situations, with emphasis on the results of the experimentation. In this way, there is the beginning of rational judgment and intellectual reasoning. During this stage, the child further differentiates self from objects. This is evident in child's increasing ability to venture away from their parents and to tolerate longer periods of separation.

Awareness of a **causal relationship** between two events is apparent. After flipping a light switch, toddlers are aware that a reciprocal response occurs. However, they are not able to transfer that knowledge to new situations. Therefore, every time they see what appears to be a light switch, they must reinvestigate its function. Such behavior demonstrates the beginning of categorizing data into distinct classes and subclasses. Innumerable examples of this type of behavior occur as toddlers continuously explore the same object each time it appears in a new place.

Because classification of objects is still basic, the appearance of an object indicates its function. For example, if the child's toys are stored in a paper bag or large container, the toddler does not perceive a difference between the toy receptacle and the garbage pail or laundry basket. If allowed to turn over the toy receptacle, the child will just as quickly do the same to other similar containers because, in the child's mind, there is no difference. Expecting the child to judge which receptacles are permissible to explore and which are not is inappropriate for this age group. Instead, the