

Toddler Visit #12

- PIPE: What Are Children Really Learning?



Topics for Next Visit:

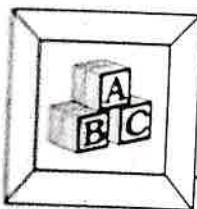
- 18 Month Growth & Development
- Responding to Challenging Behavior



What Are Children Really Learning?



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Conceptual Overview

1. The first relationships are the foundation for all learning. An incredible amount of learning occurs in the first three years of life. Babies go from awkward sucking motions to peanut butter sandwiches, from coos and smiles to books and songs, from jerky movements to climbing and jumping. Much of this is biologically programmed. Parents do not teach their babies to reach, sit, or crawl; these skills happen because of brain maturation. Developmental milestones are similar and predictable for most babies. If babies are so similar, why are adults so different?

Parents plan and interpret most of their baby's experiences. Through relationships with their parents, babies are really learning how to control their nervous systems and emotions, how to organize and focus their minds and how to behave so as to "fit in" and enjoy other humans. These are lessons of stabilization and socialization. These lessons will be different for every baby.

2. Parents influence the uniqueness of their child. Parents provide the genetic makeup that determines differences in skin color, hair color, stature, and temperament. These genes may also play a role in what babies will be good at, such as throwing a ball, writing a book, or being a musician. Parents contribute to the differences between babies by the nutrition they provide and by the routines they establish. Babies' and toddlers' schedules and surroundings influence their health and play a role in what they learn.

More importantly, parents provide the cocoon that surrounds, nurtures, and guides the child's maturation and learning. In the first three years, the relationship with parents gives babies and toddlers feelings of safety and protection, while also giving shape and structure to their lives. Parents regulate their child's temperament and emotion. They calm and comfort. Parents focus and engage. They model and share feelings and actions. Through emotional sharing, parents help interpret their child's experiences as "good" or "bad." For example, a parent's emotional reaction when a bee or spider is in the house tells the child if this is interesting or fearful. Positive relationships give stability, which organizes a child's brain. This maximizes development and opens the doors to possibility.

3. In the first year, parents establish their child's foundation for learning. Parents who provide a safe nurturing place for babies to survive teach confidence and trust. Parents who share positive, calm emotions steady their babies' sensitive nervous systems. They teach self-control and balance. Parents who set patterns and schedules give babies a sense of focus and structure. Parents who provide the human model for babies to copy teach the baby how to manage new people and new experiences. By guiding babies with appropriate toys and experiences, parents set small, reachable goals that give their babies feel-

PLAY

TOPIC 4

ings of mastery. Parents who provide praise and love help their babies feel valued. This gives babies stability or balance.

4. In the second and third year, parents teach and model social skills. As the child matures, learning becomes more complex. By the end of the first year, most babies are trying to walk and beginning to say words. There is a strong spurt in initiative. "What can I do? How far can I go? What are all of these things in my world?" The toddler is experimenting with power. "How do I affect others? How do I get what I want?" "What if I say 'NO'?"

The lessons of the second year are about social skills. Parents are teaching their toddlers how to "fit in" and belong with other humans. When parents regulate their toddlers' emotional swings, they are teaching self-control. When parents allow their toddlers to feel independent and powerful, they are teaching competence and problem solving. When parents know *how* and *when* to limit toddlers, they are teaching respect.

As toddlers begin learning words, parents are teaching meanings. They teach their toddlers how to clearly express their needs and how to negotiate their wants. Parents teach their toddlers how to use others as helpers. They teach their toddlers how to cooperate and to share. Parents show toddlers how to be patient and how to understand about others' feelings. In this way they are helping their children develop empathy and conscience. In the first three years, parents define their child's basic sense of values — the "do's" and "don'ts" of living together.

5. How parents teach defines how babies and toddlers will learn. The differences in how parents teach and model behavior will make a lasting difference in how the child continues to learn. Teaching styles can give confidence and make learning exciting, or they can confuse and inhibit learning. Differences in motivation to learn, ability to focus, and persistence are initiated within the relationships of the first three years.

Often parents have learned their teaching styles from their own parents. Some have copied grandparents; some have watched teachers and mentors they like. Today we know much more about how babies and toddlers learn in these early years. We can offer parents new information and different styles to use. The mentoring styles (scaffolding, supporting, and instructing) are the best ways to encourage learning. Changing a parent's teaching style is not easy. It takes commitment and practice.



The Second and Third Years: Relationships Teach Socialization

The second year is the age of initiative. Babies become toddlers. They start to walk and talk. They meet more people. They are more assertive and strong-willed. "How do I get what I want?" "How do I manage my fear and my anger?" "Can I influence the people around me?" They are experimenting with relationships. "What if I don't do what I'm told?" "Where do I fit in with other people?" "Am I valued; am I loved?"

By the third year, toddlers begin to master social skills; they have learned some rules and limits; they know who smiles and who growls. They can talk and play. Keeping a memory image of their parents for confidence and guidance, they can feel safe being independent. The patterns they have learned will be their base for the future.

Who will show them how to behave, how to belong, how to value others?

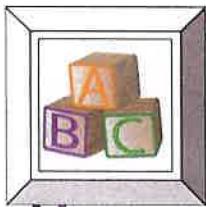
- Parents are the first model of how to live with and enjoy other people.
- Parents demonstrate how to manage emotions and deal with frustrations.
- Parents celebrate the positives, giving their children resiliency.

Parents demonstrate how to manage emotions. The second and third years are times of exploration for toddlers who have little information in memory. They become quickly angry or frightened and cannot regain balance. Parents steady children's emotions and teach them calm, clear alternatives and how to understand the feelings of others. They will learn emotional regulation.

Parents teach the do's and don'ts of behavior. Toddlers really want to please their parents. Toddlers copy actions more than they listen to or understand words. When parents join in with toddlers, they show them what they want. Through their example, "This is what we do," parents help their children master the rules and learn to fit in with others. They show toddlers how to eat, brush teeth, bathe, and dress. They show toddlers how to focus their attention, how to share a book, make a picture, or use a toy. Parents will shape what the toddler will like. They will learn behavioral control.

Parents show their children how to meet and enjoy other people. Children copy their parents' faces, voice tones, and actions. They watch their parents intently to learn how to behave. When parents are friendly with others, their children learn to make friends. When parents use words with their actions, children begin to use words; they learn to express ideas and feelings. Children join into a "shared space" with parents to learn how to relate and connect with others. Communication and social skills develop.

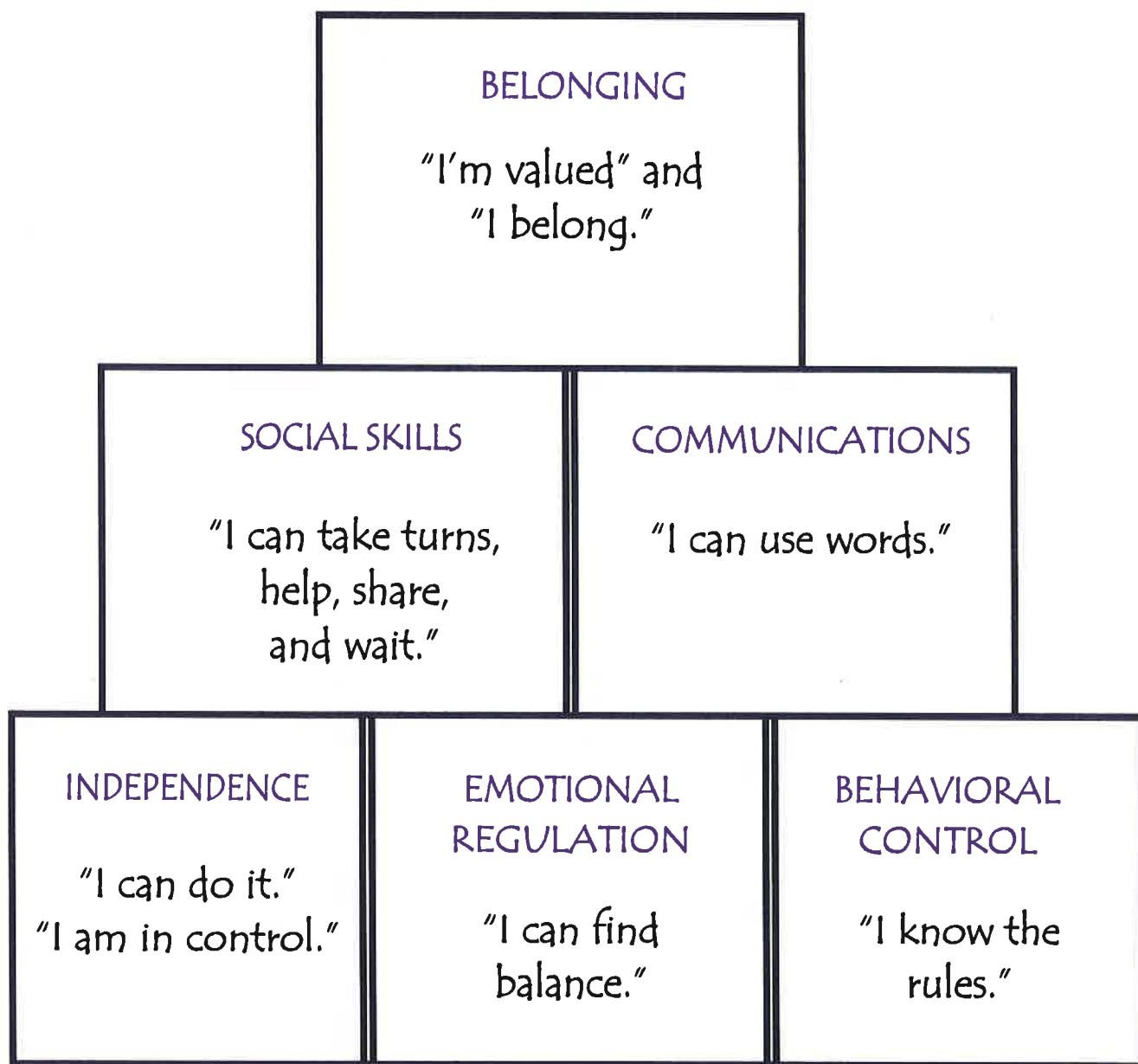
Parents support the development of independence. They allow their child to explore, experiment, and practice new skills, which encourages mastery. Parents can structure for a toddler's success. They teach problem solving and self-confidence grows.

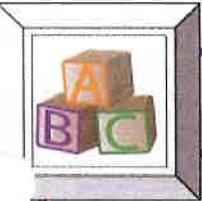


The Second and Third Years: Socialization

The first relationships set the pattern for all others. By modeling and teaching, parents show children how to belong and learn from others.

Children learn:





Teaching Styles

Mentoring Styles

Learning Lots

Children feel interest and mastery.

Scaffolding

- Invests the child in tasks.
- Supports the child's ideas.
- Simplifies tasks and games.
- Keeps the child focused.
- Guides toward mastery.
- Praises small successes and builds self-confidence.

Supportive

- Plans ahead, prepares the area.
- Lets the child choose the task.
- Joins the child's interest area.
- Takes turns with the child.
- Expands the task.
- Lets the child try to "get it." Waits for the child to feel pride.

Instructive

- Finds developmentally interesting tasks.
- Models the task.
- Makes tasks into a game.
- Uses interest, surprise, and joy to focus the child on the task.
- Lets the child explore the task on his or her own.

Confusing Styles

Learning Little

Children feel confused, anxious, or bored.

Mixed Messages

- Offers choices when no choice is intended:
"Do you want to go to bed?" instead of "It is time to go to bed."
- Sounds unconvincing.
- Has no single focus; suggests too many tasks.
- Promises to do something and then does not do it.
- Gives too many directions at one time.
- When talking, looks away from the child, instead of establishing eye contact.

Permissive

- Doesn't focus the child on the task.
- Distracts the child to a new task before he or she is finished.
- Asks the child to do a task, but then does it for the child.
- Has low expectations, for example, doesn't believe the child can solve problems or help clean up.

Hurtful Styles

Learning Least

Children feel afraid, angry, and defeated.

Perfectionist/ Controlling

- Insists on a specific way of doing everything.
- Chooses the task; controls how materials and toys are used.
- Expects too much; is impatient.
- Criticizes imperfect attempts or results.
- Talks about own needs; puts them before the child's needs.
- Is serious and often demanding.

Threatening

- Threatens the child but does not follow through.
- Gets angry quickly.
- Lets the child work alone.
- Expectations for the child are too high.
- Seems unaware of the child's developmental needs.
- Calls the child names: "You dummy!"

Nagging/Blaming

- Gives constant verbal instruction. Watches. Does not model or join in.
- Gives orders; doesn't teach or support.
- Points out problems. Ignores successes.
- Sends too many messages at once.
- Allows frustration to be overwhelming.
- Blames the child if things don't work.



Scaffolding Technique



What is a scaffold?

- A scaffold is a superstructure around another structure that gives it temporary stability.
- A scaffold gives support during changes.
- A scaffold allows changes to be made easily and safely.



How are parents like a scaffold?

- They gently support the child to try something new.
- They do not take over, but add stability to the child's efforts.
- They offer praise for each step, giving confidence to the child.
- They give support or comfort when the child is unsure.



What are scaffolding techniques?

- Structure for success (safe place, good timing, right toys).
- Divide problems into doable tasks.
- Start the child with an easy, familiar task.
- Demonstrate (model) a new skill.
- Encourage: give little rewards often ("You did it!").
- Show the child the next best step for success.
- Allow the child to try and to experiment.
- Never scold. Ignore mistakes.
- Fix problems without pointing them out.
- Extend the task.
- If the child tunes out, *quit*.
- Do not finish the task for the child. Leave it undone.
- Reward the child for whatever he or she accomplishes. ("You stacked the blocks! Good job.")



Why use scaffolding?

- Scaffolding fosters learning. It is used by coaches, mentors, and support persons.