



Creating Positive Experiences for Toddlers & Preschool-Age Children

By: Robert Sege, MD, PhD, FAAP

Remember when your baby was born and looked at you with those loving eyes? The joy of that first smile? That love is still there in the toddler who is now running around the house, getting into everything.

Being a toddler involves a lot of falling, giggling, and crying. As toddlers grow and explore the world, parents can create positive experiences for them that will last a lifetime.

This sense of love and security helps build a strong foundational relationship (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Family-Relationships-Video.aspx>). It also helps fuel huge emotional growth that goes with your child's physical growth.



Everyday Ways to be Positive

Here are a few tips to help create peaceful, positive experiences for parents and their toddlers:

Read to your toddler. When you and your child snuggle as you open a book, many things happen. First, you and your child will both enjoy the time and attention together. Your toddler will learn how to sit still, listen and communicate. Reading (</English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/How-to-Share-Books-with-Your-Preschooler.aspx>) helps toddlers learn new words. Picture books help toddlers make the connection between the sound of the word and its meaning. Reading the same book over and over helps toddlers learn to anticipate what comes next—and experience the joy of getting it right! The comfort of reading teaches language, gets them ready to learn to read, provides a calm balance to toddler life.

Establish routines. Structure and routine give toddlers a feeling of security that fuels their natural curiosity and exploration. Toddlers have new abilities and new experiences every day. Toddlers with routines for bath time (</English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/Pages/Bathing-Your-Newborn.aspx>), bedtime, and meals seem to have fewer power struggles with their parents and feel more comfortable exploring the world. When toddlers know what comes next, they have an easier time changing to that part of their day. For example, a predictable bedtime ritual, which might include a bath, brushing teeth, and reading before bed with their parent, helps toddlers wind down and fall asleep.

Play with your toddler. One joy of being a parent is playing (</English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx>) like a kid again! So enjoy the time you spend together playing. Children learn from all the different ways they play. When you go to the playground, they can experience their newfound physical abilities. When they draw, color, or build with blocks, they develop hand and eye coordination. They also experience the joy of creativity. As you do these things together, you will be creating positive experiences that both of you will remember. Playing together makes it easier to deal with all the issues that arise as toddlers begin to assert their independence.

Engage toddlers in family tasks. When toddlers feel like they are a part of things, they tend to have fewer temper tantrums (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Temper-Tantrums.aspx>). On walks in the neighborhood or at the supermarket, think about playing I spy: "I spy something red!" Talk with them, ask questions, and help them learn from the experience. Toddlers who feel engaged easily learn about the world around them. They also get the attention they crave without acting out.

Connections. As children grow older, they get interested in playing with other children. Inviting another child can give your toddler a way to learn social and emotional skills (</English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Young-Children-Learn-A-Lot-When-They-Play.aspx>). It can also free you up to have a

little time to yourself. Developing trusted connections with other parents makes it easier to raise our children.

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Your pediatrician is here to help

Some toddlers have more difficult behaviors (</English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Aggressive-Behavior.aspx>) than others. If you are having challenges with your child's behavior, talk to your pediatrician. Pediatricians can offer solutions to support toddlers and help them grow from tiny newborns into independent young children.

Resource

- What's the Best Way to Discipline My Child? (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx>)
- Parenting in a Pandemic (</English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Parenting-in-a-Pandemic.aspx>)
- Ages and Stages: Preschool (</English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/default.aspx>)
- ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences (</English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/ACEs-Adverse-Childhood-Experiences.aspx>)

About Dr. Sege



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