



Social Development: 2 Year Olds

Children this age can seem more concerned about their own needs and act selfishly. They may refuse to share things that interests them, and they do not interact well with other children, even when playing side by side—that is, unless they want a toy or object from a playmate.

At times, your child's behavior may make you upset. But if you take a close look, you'll notice that all other children their age probably are acting the same way.



Learning empathy

At the same time, two-year-olds are developing the ability to express true empathy. You can help that process by talking about how other people feel: "Emma is crying. She is sad because you took her car. Can you please give it back?" Don't expect your two-year-old to always be able to control their behavior; she is still working on that skill. But with your help they can practice and keep getting better

Is my two-year-old spoiled?

With such self-directed behavior, you may find yourself worrying that your two-year-old is spoiled or out of control. Likely, your fears are unfounded, and they'll pass through this phase. Highly active, aggressive children who push and shove usually are just as "normal" as quiet, shy ones who never seem to act out their thoughts and feelings.

Imitation & pretend play

Ironically, despite your child's apparent self-interest, they'll spend much of their playtime imitating other people's mannerisms and activities. "Pretend" is a favorite game at this age. When your two-year-old puts their teddy to bed, you may hear them use exactly the same words and tone of voice you use when telling them to go to sleep. No matter how they otherwise resist your instructions, when your child moves over into the parent role, they imitate you exactly.

These play activities help your child learn what it's like to be in someone else's shoes, and serve as valuable rehearsals for future social encounters. They'll also help you appreciate the importance of being a good role model, by demonstrating that children often do as we do, not as we say.

Playgroups for two-year-olds

Your two-year-old will best learn how to behave around other people by being given plenty of trial runs. Don't let their relatively antisocial behavior discourage you from getting playgroups together. At first it may be wise to limit the groups to two or three children. And although you'll need to monitor the group so that no one gets hurt or overly upset, you should let the children guide themselves as much as possible. They need to learn how to play with one another, not with one another's parents.

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