



Cognitive Development: Two-Year-Old

Think back to your child's infancy and early toddler months. That was a time when he learned about the world by touching, looking, manipulating, and listening. Now, as a two-year-old, the learning process has become more thoughtful. His grasp of language is increasing, and he's beginning to form mental images for things, actions, and concepts. He also can solve some problems in his head, performing mental trial-and-error instead of having to manipulate objects physically. And as his memory and intellectual abilities develop, he'll begin to understand simple time concepts, such as "You can play *after* you finish eating."



Your toddler also is starting to understand the relationship between objects. For instance, he'll be able to match similar shapes when you give him shape sorting toys and simple jigsaw puzzles. He'll also begin to recognize the purpose of numbers in counting objects—especially the number two. And as his understanding of cause and effect develops, he'll become much more interested in winding up toys and turning lights and appliances on and off.

You'll also notice your toddler's play growing more complex. Most noticeably, he'll start stringing together different activities to create a logical sequence. Instead of drifting randomly from one toy to another, he may first put a doll to bed and then cover it up. Or he may pretend to feed several dolls, one after the other. Over the next few years, he'll put together longer and more elaborate sequences of make-believe, acting out much of his own daily routine, from getting up in the morning to taking a bath and going to bed at night.

If we were to single out the major intellectual limitation at this age, it would be your child's feeling that everything that happens in his world is the result of something he has done. With a belief like this, it becomes very difficult for him to understand correctly such concepts as death, divorce, or illness, without feeling that he played some role in it. So if parents separate or a family member gets sick, children often feel responsible.

Reasoning with your two-year-old is often difficult. After all, he views everything in extremely simple terms. He still often confuses fantasy with reality unless he's actively playing make-believe. Therefore, during this stage, be sure to choose your own words carefully: Comments that you think are funny or playful—such as "If you eat more cereal, you'll explode"—actually may panic him, since he won't know you're joking.

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