



Cognitive Development: One-Year-Old

As you watch your toddler at play, have you noticed how hard she concentrates on everything she does? Each game or task is a learning proposition, and she'll gather all sorts of information about the way things work. She'll also now be able to draw on facts she's already learned in order to make decisions and find solutions to play-related challenges. However, she'll be interested in solving only those problems that are appropriate for her developmental and learning level, so hand her a toy that fascinated her at eleven months and she may walk away bored. Or suggest a game that's too advanced and she'll object. She'll be especially attracted to mechanical devices, such as wind-up toys, switches, buttons, and knobs. It may be difficult for you to judge exactly what she can and can't handle at this age, but it's not hard for her to decide. Provide her with a range of activities, and she'll select the ones that are challenging but not completely beyond her abilities.



Imitation is a big part of her learning process at this age. Instead of simply manipulating household objects, as she did during her first year, she'll actually use a brush on her hair, babble into the phone, turn the steering wheel of her toy car, and push it back and forth. At first, she'll be the only one involved in these activities, but gradually she'll include other players. She might brush her doll's hair, "read" to you from her book, offer a playmate a pretend drink, or hold her toy phone to your ear. Because imitation is such an important part of her behavior and learning, now, perhaps more than ever, you need to be aware of the behaviors that you are modeling for her. Remember, things that you say or do might be replayed (either to your great pleasure or dismay!) over and over again as she plays and learns. Older siblings are crucial here. This copying behavior happens between toddlers and their older siblings. It is an ideal time to take advantage of these natural developmental cues.

Well before her second birthday, your toddler will excel at hiding games, remembering where hidden objects are long after they leave her sight. If you pocket her ball or cracker while she's playing, you may forget all about it, but she won't!

As she masters hide-and-seek, she'll also become more understanding about separations from you. Just as she knows that a hidden object is somewhere, even when she can't see it, she'll now recognize that you always come back, even when you're away from her a whole day. If you actually show her where you go when you leave her—to work or to the grocery store, for example—she'll form a mental image of you there. This may make the separation even easier for her.

At this age, your toddler is very much the director; she lets you know what role she wants you to play in her activities. Sometimes she'll bring you a toy so you can help her make it work; other times she'll pull it away from you to try it by herself. Often, when she knows she's done something special, she'll pause and wait for your applause. By responding to these cues, you'll provide the support and encouragement she needs to keep learning.

You also must supply the judgment that she still lacks. Yes, she now understands how certain things behave, but—because she can't see how one thing affects another—she doesn't yet grasp the full notion of consequences. So even though she may understand that her toy wagon will roll downhill, she can't predict what will happen when it lands in the middle of the busy street below. Although she knows that a door swings open and shut, she doesn't know that she has to keep her hand from getting caught in it. And even if she's found out the hard way once, don't assume she's learned her lesson. Chances are she doesn't associate her pain with the chain of events that led up to it, and she almost certainly won't remember this sequence the next time. Until she develops her own common sense, she'll need your vigilance to keep her safe.

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