



## Social Development: 1 Year Olds

During his second year, your toddler will develop a very specific image of his social world, friends, and acquaintances. He is at its center, and while you may be close at hand, he is most concerned about where things are in relation to himself. He knows that other people exist, and they vaguely interest him, but he has no idea how they think or what they feel. As far as he's concerned, everyone thinks as he does.



As you can imagine, his view of the world (technically, some experts call it egocentric or self-centered) often makes it difficult for him to play with other children in a truly social sense. He'll play alongside and compete for toys, but he doesn't play cooperative games easily. He'll enjoy watching and being around other children, especially if they're slightly older. He may imitate them or treat them the way he does dolls, for example, trying to brush their hair, but he's usually surprised and resists when they try to do the same thing to him. He may offer them toys or things to eat but may get upset if they respond by taking what he's offered them.

*Sharing* is a meaningless term to a child this age. Every toddler believes that he alone deserves the spotlight. Unfortunately, most are also as assertive as they are self-centered, and competition for toys and attention frequently erupts into hitting and tears. How can you minimize the combat when your child's "friends" are over? Try providing plenty of toys for everyone and be prepared to referee.

As we've suggested earlier, your child also may start to show possessiveness over toys that he knows belong to him. If another child even touches the plaything, he may rush over and snatch it away. Try reassuring him that the other child is "only looking at it" and that "it's okay for him to have a turn with it." But also acknowledge that "Yes, it's your toy, and he's not going to take it away from you." It may help to select a couple of particularly prized items and make them off limits to everyone else. Sometimes this helps toddlers feel they have some control over their world and makes them less possessive about other belongings.

Because children this age have so little awareness of the feelings of others, they can be very physical in their responses to the children around them. Even when just exploring or showing affection, they may poke each other's eyes or pat a little too hard. (The same is true of their treatment of animals.) When they're upset, they can hit or slap without realizing they are hurting the other child. For this reason, be alert whenever your toddler is among playmates, and pull him back as soon as this physical aggressiveness occurs. Tell him, "Don't hit," and redirect all the children to friendlier play.

Fortunately, your toddler will show his self-awareness in less aggressive ways, as well. By eighteen months, he'll be able to say his own name. At about the same time, he'll identify his reflection in the mirror and start showing a greater interest in caring for himself. As he approaches age two, he may be able to brush his teeth and wash his hands if shown how to do it. He'll also help dress and, especially, undress himself. Many times a day you may find him busily removing his shoes and socks even in the middle of a store or the park.

Because your toddler is a great imitator, he will be learning important social skills from the way you handle conflicts between the two of you. Model for him the way words and listening can, at least on occasion, be used to resolve conflicts ("I know you want to get down and walk, but you must hold my hand so I know you're safe"). As an imitator, he also will eagerly participate in anything you're doing around the house. Whether you're reading the paper, sweeping the floors, mowing the lawn, or making dinner, he'll want to "help." Even though it may take longer with him doing so, try to turn it into a game. If you're doing something he can't help with because it's dangerous or you're in a hurry, look for another "chore" he *can* do. By all means, don't discourage these wonderful impulses to be helpful. Helping, like sharing, is a vital social skill, and the sooner he develops it, the more pleasant life will be for everyone.

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