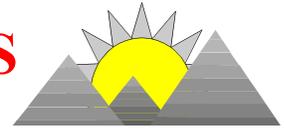


# GREAT BEGINNINGS

A Series for Parents of Young Children



## 27 MONTHS

### Toddler Years Are Busy Years

With all this activity and stress it may be hard to remember that these first 3 years are a very important time in your child's life. You have the opportunity now to help your child become a responsible, loving, capable person.

Try to enjoy these busy, important years. Be good to yourselves. Take time out when you can and share child care with others when you need a break. Enjoy your child's development and celebrate her accomplishments. Reward your successes, and don't be hard on mistakes. All parents make them.

When these busy toddler years are long past, you will probably look back on this time with pleasure and nostalgia. For now, do all you can to make the most of these important years.

### Watch Out: Keep Your Child from Choking

Children choke on small things they put in their mouths. Your child will explore his world by putting everything he can grab into his mouth. Here are some ways you can help your child avoid choking:

- Never leave small things in your child's reach even for a moment.
- Do not feed your child hard pieces of food.
- Look for small objects on the floor before you put your child down.

- Do not let your child run with food in his mouth.

### Questions

**Q:** "Will my daughter be left-handed? She feeds herself and reaches for toys with her left hand. I don't want her to be left-handed, but I've heard that if I try to keep her from using her left hand, it may cause problems. Should I try to make her use her right hand?"

**A:** Most children change handedness several times before settling down to their preference. The key word is preference. Most children settle into a left or right hand preference but some children continue to have equal skill in both left and right hands throughout their lives.

Don't try to make her use her right hand. Preference in using hands, feet, and eyes is already present in the child's brain at birth. If you pressure your daughter to change her preference, she may become confused. Forcing her to change might also affect her self-confidence and her learning. If your daughter is really left-handed, she won't be alone. Fifteen percent of the U. S. population is left-handed.

## Nutrition: Food Rewards Can Backfire

“If you behave at the shoe store, I’ll buy you a candy bar.” “Be a good girl at grandma’s house, and you’ll get an ice cream cone.”

It is tempting to use food to try to control your child’s behavior, but it can backfire. Soon your child believes that desirable foods are the ones used as rewards or bribes. These foods are almost always high in sugar or fat, or both—like candies, cakes, cookies, chips, and ice cream. As your child gets older, she will have more control over what she eats. If she chooses a lot of these high in sugar, high in fat foods, then her diet will be poor. This can lead to ill health.

Parents often mean well when they say, “You can’t have dessert until you finish all of your vegetables.” They think they are doing something good by getting their child to eat the vegetables. But the message the child hears can be very different. She hears: “You have to eat the *bad* vegetables in order to get the *good* dessert.”

You don’t want your child to think of any healthy foods as *bad*. Let her eat what she wants, and still have dessert. You can make the dessert something low in fat and sugar—like a fruit juice popsicle.

So what is a parent to do? Do not use any food, even nutritious foods, as a bribe or reward. Encourage your child to eat a wide variety of foods, so she will get all the nutrients needed for growth and health.

Reward your child with hugs, kisses, and praise. Saying, “You didn’t fuss in the shoe store. That made mommy very happy,” is a better reward than candy. This reward helps your child feel good about herself.

## School at Home

How would you like to start a school in your home? If you’re thinking about books, a chalkboard, and rows of desks, that’s not the idea. This school is not

only in your home; it **is** your home, your family, and your day-to-day activities.

You might say, “But I don’t know how to teach.” You don’t need a teaching degree or years of experience. You just need to remember your ABCs:

**A** child’s first and most important teachers are his parents.

**B**e alert to the new situations your child faces each day.

**C**onduct short, simple lessons many times during the day.

Now here is how to conduct your school. Keep learning fun! Teach by playing games and talking to your child in a friendly way.

**Teach colors:** as you set the table, talk about the red dishes, the blue tablecloth. As you sort the clothes, talk about the blue jeans, the white shirt. Talk about shapes of toys or furnishings in your home—the round mirror, the square table.

Teach about similarities and differences by helping your child sort spoons and forks in the drawer.

Teach about language and books by showing pictures and reading short stories to your child again, again, and again. Talk with him about the story.

Remember, your child’s first school is in your home. The lessons you teach will prepare him to learn even more when he starts preschool and kindergarten. Children who have been taught at home enjoy learning and usually learn faster when they start school.

## Discipline with “Time Out”

When you use it the right way, *time out* can be a good way to handle those times when your toddler seems determined to disobey and nothing you do will stop her. Time out means putting your toddler

in a safe place away from you for a few minutes. This gives you a chance to calm down if you need it and lets your toddler know you are not going to let her continue her disobedient or naughty behavior. Time out should be used so that it does **not** make your toddler feel you don't love her or that you want to hurt her.

Here are some important things to do to keep time out as a positive discipline method, not punishment:

**Tell your child about time out.** Tell your child ahead of time, before a rule is broken, what time out is and how you will use it.

**Choose the time out place carefully.** Use a safe, non-scary place like a room, a chair, a playpen, or a part of a room. Never use a closet or place that is dangerous or frightening to your child.

Let your toddler know why you are using time out and how long it will last. Explain to your toddler before time out why she is being disciplined. Tell her how long time out will be and tell her you will come to get her when the time is up. Keep your promise.

**Keep time out short.** For a toddler, time out should last no more than 3 minutes, or 1 minute for each year of your child's life. Set a timer and be sure you follow your time limits. When the time is up, go in to her, give her a hug, and invite her to be with you.

**Try to stay calm.** When you use time out or any kind of discipline, try to keep calm. Explain clearly to your child why you are limiting her. Follow through in a way that is firm, but also shows that you love and care for her.

## Toddlers Show Their Feelings

Toddlers naturally show you and tell you that they love you. Welcome and enjoy these feelings. You'll want to show your affection toward your toddler too, with words and hugs.

But toddlers also just as naturally, sometimes say and show that they dislike you. Parents

understandably find these angry words and actions hard to accept. It is much nicer to hear "I love you" than "I hate you," but both kinds of feelings are common with toddlers.

**Expect angry feelings.** These expressions of negative feelings are part of growing up. Try to handle these actions and feelings with understanding instead of argument or punishment.

**Angry feelings are normal.** These words and actions don't mean you have been a bad parent or that your toddler truly dislikes you. Understand that your toddler's anger is temporary and normal.

**Help your child accept negative feelings.** Show your child that you care for him even when he is angry, and that angry feelings are okay. Firmly prevent him from turning his feelings into angry actions such as biting, kicking, and hitting. Do not give in to his unreasonable demands just to prevent angry outbursts. You might try to talk to him and find out more about why he is feeling angry.

Hang in there! Be patient; the good and loving relationship you have with your toddler will keep these angry times short.

## Games for Growing: Sorting

**Purpose of the Game:** To help your child learn about how things can be alike or different.

**How to Play:** Find three or four each of about four different things, like four playing cards, four ribbons, four pebbles, four leaves. Mix these up and put them in a pile or a bowl. Ask your child to sort them into piles of things that are just alike.

If your child wants, you can take a turn at sorting too. To make the game harder, you can make all the things almost alike such as four small paper squares, four medium-sized paper squares, and four large paper squares.

Remember, play this and any game only as long as it's fun for your child and you.

## **Safety Tips: Injury Prevention**

### ***Falls***

Your child is now able to throw a ball, jump, run, pedal a tricycle and move at lightning speed. His abilities are so great now that he is able to get himself into an endless variety of dangers at home and in the neighborhood.

He will fall off play equipment and bikes, out of windows, down stairs, and off everything he has climbed on.

Lock the doors to any dangerous areas. Use gates on stairways and window guards above the first floor. Fence the play yard. If your child has a serious fall, call your doctor.

### ***Burns***

The kitchen can be a dangerous place for your child during meal preparation. If he is under foot, hot liquids, grease, and hot foods spilled on him can cause serious burns. Find something safe for him to do during these dangerous times of the day.

And, remember that kitchen appliances and other hot surfaces such as irons and wall heaters are very real dangers to your child long after you have finished using them.

If your child does get burned, put cold water on the burned area immediately. Then cover the burn loosely with a bandage or clean cloth. Call your doctor for all burns. To protect your child from scalds, reduce the temperature of your hot water to 120°-140°F.

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