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29 Months

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GREAT BEGINNINGS

A Series for Parents of Young Children

29 MONTHS

Your Toddler Is Learning New Words

Isn't it amazing how fast your toddler is learning new words? Language learning may be your child's most important accomplishment this year.

You are helping. Every time you sing her a song, read her a story, or repeat a nursery rhyme, your toddler learns about language, and learns that you enjoy language. Remember, your child learns by imitating you and by catching your enthusiasm.

In their eagerness to teach their little ones about language, some parents forget that language goes two ways. Children must **hear** people use language, but they also need adults to **listen and respond** to their words. Let your little one tell you stories, "read" books to you, describe things she has seen, and answer your questions. Help her make up songs, encourage her to play at rhyming words or making up new words. Show your child that what she says is important to you. Remember, communication means talking **and** listening.

Nutrition: Good Times at Mealtimes

Mealtime is not just a time to eat. It can be a time to talk, share, and enjoy being with others. Family members can tell each other what has been happening at school, work, or home. Even though your toddler may not talk well, let him take part in this sharing. Ask him questions, and let him answer for himself.

Mealtime is not a good time to discuss family problems about money, misbehavior, and the like. No one feels like eating when there is an argument going on. If this happens often, your child will begin to dread meals. He will eat as quickly as possible and then want to leave the table. He may begin to have stomach aches because mealtime is unpleasant.

Talk about problems after the meal is over and everyone has left the table. During meals, think of things to talk about that will help everyone feel good about themselves and others.

If you are eating alone with your child, you can talk about the names of the different foods on his plate and the color and shape of each food. You can count how many different foods or pieces of food there are on his plate. With a little imagination and planning, you and your toddler can make every meal a happy meal.

Games for Growing: What's It for?

Purpose of the Game: To help your child understand how things are used. This game also helps build your child's imagination and language skills.

How to Play: Collect about 10 things that your child uses or has seen used, such as a shoe lace, a fork, a napkin, a comb, a key, eyeglasses, a spool of thread, a hammer, a paint brush, a pencil. Pick up one after the other and ask your child what it is used for.

Give your child a turn to ask you what things are used for. You can play a silly version of this game too by asking a silly question about each thing you pick up. For example, you can pick up a cup and ask if that is what you brush your teeth with. Remember, play the game only as long as it is fun for both of you.

Homemade Toys that Teach: Play Dough

Play dough helps your toddler practice using his hands and fingers and learn how to mold different shapes by patting, squeezing, and rolling.

Ingredients:
1 cup of flour
1/2 cup of salt
1 teaspoon of cream of tartar
1 cup of water
1 tablespoon of cooking oil
Food coloring (optional)

Making the play dough: Mix the dry ingredients, add the water and oil. Stir over low heat until the mixture forms a ball. Add food coloring if you want. Knead it and let it cool. Store it in a refrigerator in a covered container.

Playing: Put the play dough on a plastic place mat and protect the floor from spills. Your toddler will enjoy having you near her when she plays with her play dough. You can give her ideas on how to squeeze, roll, and pinch the dough. Add cookie cutters, a dull knife, a rolling pin to encourage your child's creativity.

Toddler Talk: I Learn in Lots of Ways

- Let me use a sprinkler can or squeeze bottle to water outdoor plants. Think of other ways I could help outside.
- Give me my own flashlight. I'll enjoy turning it on because I can push the switch forward with my thumb. I probably can't pull it back. Show me how to turn the flashlight around so I can push the switch off.
- Take pictures of special times and write the date on the back of the pictures. Even if you don't have a baby book for me, I will like looking at these pictures now and when I'm older.
- Turn off the radio and television. Listen with me to sounds around the house, like running water, the refrigerator motor, a ticking clock, or a wind chime. Tell me what they are. Helping me learn to listen will help me learn language.

Guidance and Discipline: Avoid Overusing "No"

The fewer times you say "no" to your toddler, the less she'll scream "no" back at you. Keep asking yourself, "How can I help my child do what I want her to do without saying *no*?" Life can be more pleasant for everyone with fewer "nos." Here are some ideas:

Look for ways to structure routines and play spaces to reduce the need for restriction and discipline. Remove tempting dangers and breakables. Try to reduce time spent in activities that require your toddler's patience or that might cause conflict. For example, long shopping trips seem to undo nearly all parents and their toddlers; try to keep them short.

Keep rules reasonable. Your child is growing fast, but her ability to understand is still more limited than you might expect. She will press you to let her do things on her own—and that's important for her learning—but she still may have accidents. She may break, drop, or spill things. She can understand some rules, but not all.

Give your toddler independence practice. As part of their growing independence, toddlers are often defiant and non-cooperative. You need to be firm but patient in enforcing rules. Look for safe and reasonable opportunities to let your toddler make her own decisions so she can practice her growing independence.

Play detective. If your little one does something over and over that you have told her not to do, try to figure out the reason. Don't assume that she is just trying to annoy you. Chances are she's got her own

very good reasons for doing what she's doing. See if you can help her get what she wants in a way that is okay with both of you.

Sure, all this takes more time and patience and energy than saying "no," but the long term benefits are likely to be a toddler who is happier and easier to live with.

Television

We don't know the effects of television viewing on very young children. Research on older children, however, suggests the following:

Children who are aggressive tend to watch a lot of violence on television.

Children are attracted to and influenced by television commercials. They may pressure parents to buy toys and food advertised on television. Many of these toys may not be right for your child. The foods may not be good for him, since many of those advertised are high in sugar, fat, and salt.

Children who are heavy television viewers use less imagination in their play and school activities than children who see less television.

Very young children enjoy the catchy tunes and repeated phrases used in cartoons, children's shows, and commercials. These jingles give them a chance to practice their listening and talking skills.

Very young children don't understand the meaning of television programs. However, they may be developing a television viewing habit that will keep them from other healthier activities. If your child shows a great interest in television, then talking and listening may be important to him right now. Read to him and talk with him about pictures in a book. Play some story tapes or records. Substitute these things for some of his television viewing time.

Think about these questions when you decide how much television your child should watch. Do you know how many hours a day your child watches? Do you know which programs he watches and do you know what he's learning from them? It is important for you to know these things. Do you watch television with your child and discuss what you are seeing? Doing this will help your child understand his world.

Do you want your child to see violence on television? Violent situations are shown even in cartoons and music videos, and they can be scary.

Does television keep you from reading, talking, and playing with your child? Does it keep him from creative, active, or imaginative play?

Television can be a very powerful influence in children's lives. It can entertain and educate. It can take children away from other important activities.

Begin deciding now how much television you want your child to see and what programs you want him to watch. If you set up some clear guidelines now, it will be easier to handle television later.

NOTE: Ask about "Parenting in a TV Age," workshops available through your County Extension Office.

Questions

Q: "My 2 1/2 year old won't go to sleep when I put her to bed. What can I do?"

A: Bedtime is not always sleep time. Young children need regular bedtimes and special bedtime routines, like teeth cleaning, stories, and hugs. Parents need regular bedtimes for their children, so they can have some relaxation time.

You can expect your child to go to bed and be quiet at set times. Don't worry if she does not always go to sleep as soon as she goes to bed. When she isn't sleepy, let her have some quiet play time in bed until sleep comes.

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This issue has been adapted from **Parent Express**, by Dr. Dorothea Cudaback, Cooperative Extension, University of California, and her colleagues throughout the national Cooperative Extension System.

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