

living with toddlers

Between the ages of one and three years your toddler's world is growing rapidly. This is a time of many changes for toddlers. The most important lesson for your children in these years is that they are separate, independent people.

Many of the troubles that some parents experience with their two year olds are because children are struggling with learning to feel independent. At the same time they are still babies in many ways and need a lot of parental support.

It is normal for children of this age to:

- want to say "no"
- get cross and rebel sometimes
- want to make some choices for themselves
- find it hard to cope with changes
- want to feel very secure and safe, but at the same time try out their new independence.

Sometimes when they are on the way to learning self-control children will say "No! No! No!" to themselves while they do something that is forbidden. They are not deliberately being disobedient.



They are on the way to learning what they must not do, but haven't quite got there yet. All of this is saying "I am a separate person, I am me!"

Make your home safe and enjoyable

- Make your house as childproof as possible.
- Have as few rules as possible. Put your good things away for the time being.
- Make interesting changes every now and again e.g. a pile of cushions to climb over, a cardboard box tunnel, a cubby house under the table.
- Make sure that there is a place and space for your child to explore and run every day.
- If children have to go somewhere in the car or wait in a waiting room, take some toys to keep them busy.

Learning to be independent

- Make up fun games where your child can practise saying "No." For example, "Does Daddy sleep in the bath?", "Does the cat say moo?"
- Don't give your child a choice if there isn't one. For example, if you have to pick up an older child from school, don't ask your toddler if they want to come. Say, "We're going to the school in the car now."
- If there is something they don't want to do, try to make a game of it. You could say, "See if you can race me to the bath."
- Give information when appropriate. For example, try saying, "Be gentle with the puppy. If you hurt him he may bite you." rather than "Stop doing that." Lift the child away if the behaviour continues.
- Give simple choices wherever you can. "Do you want to wear your blue shirt or your red shirt today?" (Some young children find it very difficult to make choices and they may need you to choose for them).
- Be positive. For example, instead of saying "Don't slam the door" say "I know that you can shut the door quietly, let's see you do it." Then give praise for learning a new skill.



- If your child refuses to come with you and there is no time to use any of the above methods, pick them up and carry them, don't threaten to leave them. This is very frightening for young children.
- Time out is when you put a child by themselves for a short time to think about what they have done wrong. Time out methods of discipline for two year olds are sometimes helpful, depending on the child. It is more acceptable as the child matures and gains an understanding of what it means. Time out can add to fear of separation.

Help children learn about feelings

- Label feelings for your young child so that they learn that feelings are something that you can talk about. For example, you could say, "You're feeling sad because daddy had to go to work."
- Separate feelings from behaviour. For example, you might say, "I know you feel cross but you must not hit. When you feel cross you can tell me." Your child will not understand all of this at first, but it is a very important lesson.
- Read stories that show children with different kinds of feelings: angry, happy, sad, afraid.
- Begin to help children understand the difference between their own feelings and other people's. For example, you could say, "It hurts Jenny when you hit her, let's touch her very gently and make her feel better." It takes many years to learn this well, but you can start when your child is very young.

Fighting fears

The world can seem very fearful to children of this age because there are lots of things they don't understand yet. They don't understand that:

- you will come back soon, because they don't understand time
- they can't fall down the plug hole in the bath, because they don't understand size and space

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

- they can't lose parts of their body if they are hurt, because they don't yet understand their bodies are all part of them
- the monsters in their dreams won't get them, because they don't yet understand what is real and what is not.

Helping young children with fears

- **Fears about cuts and bruises**
Put a band aid on sores and hurts even if you don't see the need for it.
- **Fears about going down the plug hole**
Let the child bath in a baby bath inside the big bath, for awhile. Let them use a potty instead of the big toilet.
- **Fears about nightmares**
If they have a nightmare tell them that "It's only a dream." Comfort them.
- **Fears of monsters**
Tell them that there are no monsters. Don't look for monsters under the bed, because they may think that you believe there are some there to look for.
- **Fears of separation**
Let your child have their comforter or dummy when they need it. Children usually need to keep them until they are three or four years old.
- **Fear of the dark**
Stay with your child to reassure them. Perhaps use a night light. Let them sleep in the same room as a brother or sister for awhile.

Let them know that you understand, and you don't think they are silly or babyish. Keep to bedtime routines.

If fears are really interfering with a child's life, talk it over with a counsellor who works with children. Sometimes gentle, gradual exposure to the feared situation can be helpful. This should never be done in a forceful way.

Special note: Most children grow out of their fears with lots of support and understanding.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



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