

# more about living with toddlers

As your toddler grows, you will both face daily challenges as your toddler seeks greater independence. Toddlers are learning to stand up for themselves and testing to see how much 'say' they can have about what happens to them. It's up to you to shape and guide this new-found skill. Testing their independence is a normal stage of development for young children.

So what can a parent do with a challenging toddler?

- **Have realistic expectations** Children learn gradually and an active toddler is not ALWAYS going to be cooperative at the supermarket or when you're talking on the telephone.
- **Celebrate small successes** Toddlers are learning what to do and what not to do. Focus on small successes no matter how brief, rather than concentrating on when things go wrong. For example, *"You were so helpful when you put the bread in the trolley when we first started shopping. Well done! Next time you might be able to help me even more."*



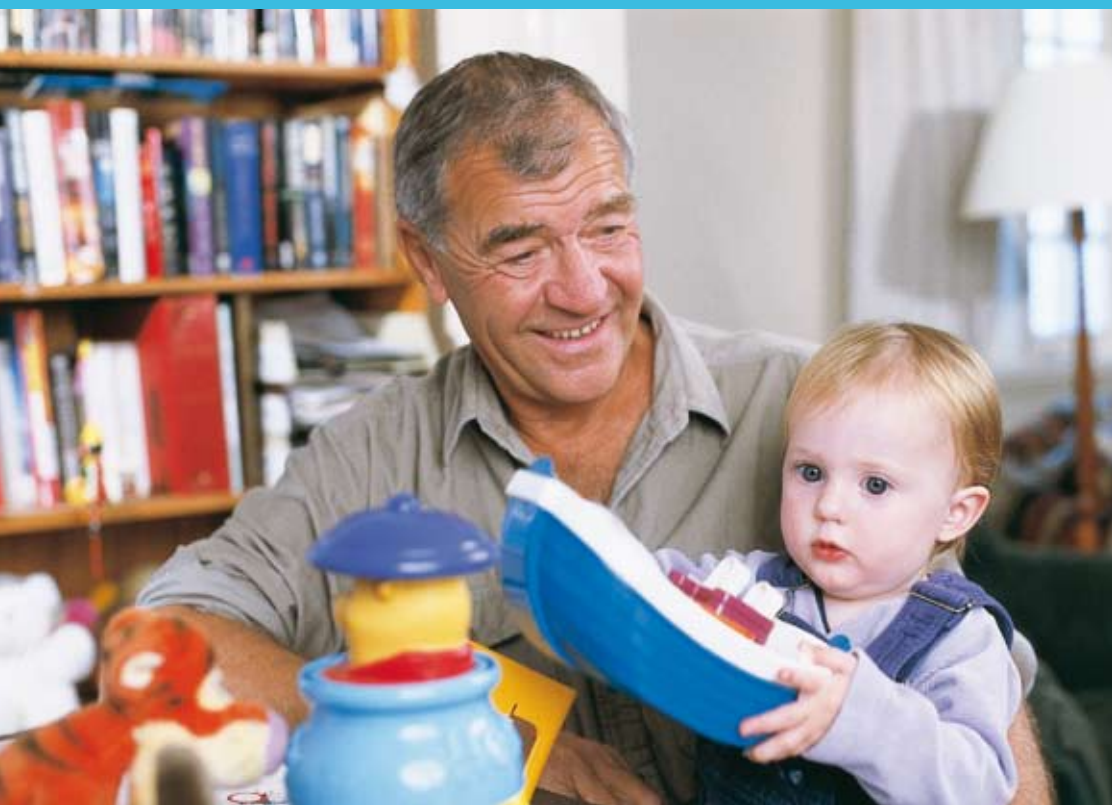
- **Set up an environment for success** Try to make your home a happy place where your child can learn and explore safely. This might mean removing precious ornaments so that everyone can relax and enjoy being together. Eventually, the toddler will move into the next stage of development and no longer want to touch everything.
- **Use each 'teachable' moment** Teachable moments are when something happens and you have a chance to talk about the behaviour. Take time to acknowledge desired behaviour and help children reflect on their own behaviour. For example, *"You spilt your drink, you should sit down when you are holding a drink. Please help me clean up."* Later, *"Thank you for helping clean up, you did a good job."*
- **Keep in mind that nothing is going to work overnight** Learning about behaviour and self-control is very hard and takes a long time, especially for young children. Encourage your child's efforts and achievements. *"Thank you for helping me put the washing away, you did a good job. You should be proud of how you matched the socks."*
- **Feelings** Talking with your child about feelings helps them know there are many ways of expressing them. Children need to know that it's okay to feel angry, but it's not okay to hit someone when you feel this way. You may be able to share some ways to talk about how to deal with feelings. For example, *"It's okay to feel sad, when I was a child, if I felt sad I used to look at a book with big colourful pictures which would always make me feel happier."*
- **Look after yourself** Try to make some time for yourself. This may be as simple as a quiet walk outside or sitting down with a 'cuppa' while your toddler sleeps.

## What about MY toddler?

- **All families and children are different** There is not one "right way" to bring up children. Use what you know about your child to select the best approaches.
- **Build Relationships** Children mostly want to get along well with their parents. Strengthen your relationship by telling your child about the things that you really like about them, and help them to be proud of themselves.
- **Positive attention** Try to ignore behaviour you don't like as long as it is not hurting anyone or dangerous for the child. Praise your child as soon as the behaviour changes for the better.
- **Dealing with difficult behaviour** Some behaviour is hard to ignore, especially if someone could get hurt. Parents need to tell children what not to do and what to do. For example, if a child is playing rough, you may have to step in and give one clear instruction. *"You need to play safely with other children. If you are unable to play safely, you need to play on your own. I can't let you hurt other children."*
- **Consequences of behaviour** Explain the problem and the consequence so that your toddler knows if the behaviour continues there will be a consequence.

For example, if playing roughly continues, remove the child to a place where they can still see the play, but are not part of it, even if they only stay away for a short while. Repeat the message, *"You must not hurt other children. If you continue to hurt other children you will have to leave the play area."*

- **Cause and effect** Teach your child about cause and effect. For example, if the child continues to play roughly, remove them from the play area again, telling them the behaviour that needs to change. Repeat the message and add, *"If you can't play without hurting others, you will have to play by yourself."* Make sure you follow through, either by ending the play or praising when the behaviour improves.
- **Mean what you say** Toddlers quickly learn you mean what you say if you follow through. Talking to children about acceptable behaviour is teaching them how to get along with other people.
- **Focus on the behaviour** Always focus on the behaviour, not the child. For example, *"I know you like playing with other children, but I cannot let you hurt them."* This way you are affirming the child's self-worth.



- Celebrate small successes.

- **Break the cycle** Toddlers learn when you respond to their behaviour in the same way each time. For example, repeatedly interrupting their unsafe play, no matter for how short a time, or how often, gives the toddler time to learn what to do and what not to do.
- **Be consistent** Give your toddler consistent messages. For example, if you laugh when your child does something cheeky at home, your child will be confused if they repeat that behaviour, maybe in public, and you are angry.
- **Seek support** Talk with friends and family and other parenting support services such as child care services or Community Child Health Services about any problems.

### Why is my toddler behaving this way?

- **Is it to get your attention?** Remember, any attention, even angry attention, is better than none. Try giving attention during “positive” moments. We all tend to repeat the behaviour that gets us some reward and makes us feel good.
- **Is your toddler tired or ill?** When your child does not cooperate, it may be through tiredness or ill health.
- **Has something happened to change things for your toddler?** A new baby, moving house, parents arguing? Talking about those things can help. With very young children who are unable to say the words, you will need to watch for facial expressions and reassure them. For example, *“I used to be this busy caring for you when you were a new baby too. When the baby is asleep we’ll have some special time, just you and me.”* Follow this perhaps by reading a story together while the baby sleeps. Tell your child that you enjoy spending time with them.
- **Does your toddler need more independence than you’re allowing?** As children grow, a change in your approach is necessary. Different families value growing independence in different ways.



Families need to balance their own needs with their toddler’s growing needs. The needs of the baby will change as the baby grows to a toddler wanting to explore and investigate. Think about how you can meet both your needs and your child’s, and plan ahead for the best chance of success. For example, if you have time, allow your toddler to dress themselves, or help set the table.

- **Choosing the right time** When your child is not tired or busy, talk to them about what you expect from them, and what is about to happen. Information such as, *“Your friends will be visiting, and you will be able to play together, while their parent and I have a coffee and watch you,”* will help your child understand what will be happening for them, and what you expect of them.

## Making rules

The fewer rules the better. Reinforce rules, by having your toddler say them back to you. Start simple! For example, "Toys put away so that the floor can be swept." Children learn most through watching you. Ask for some help and make the task fun. "I need to sweep the floor now, so we need to pick up all the toys. I'll pick up all the toys with wheels and you pick up all the soft toys." Make sure your request is realistic. If there are heavy or big toys help pick them up.

## Consequences

Consequences need to be fairly short term, and related to the incident. Toddlers would not understand if they missed out on a visit to Grandma today, because they did not pick up their toys when the floor needed sweeping yesterday. A natural consequence to toys not being picked up after a second request would be the removal of the toys for a short time.

## Advance warning

It encourages cooperation from children if you give advance notice about what is happening next. Toddlers do not understand the concept of time, so 'in a minute' does not make sense to them. For example, "*When I have finished the washing up, it will be time for your bath.*"

### Points to remember

- We are all different and sometimes you and your child's needs and expectations will differ.
- When your child misbehaves, it may be through tiredness or ill health. It's not a sign that you're a failure or that your child is setting out to deliberately annoy you.

- Be realistic in what you expect of children. Check with your friends and support networks about what to expect of children the same age.
- Build the relationship with your child by noticing the things they try to do well, and praise them for doing it well.
- If your child is not cooperating, try other management methods such as planning differently for next time, or explaining, or showing, or making rules and giving consequences.
- Make your home a place where children can learn self-control and enjoy little successes.
- Look after yourself. You are an important person in your child's life.



## 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.

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](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au)



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