

Development From 12 to 24 Months Old: Strong, Positive Connections and Interactions Fuel Learning

In this second year of life, children are like little scientists, eagerly trying to figure out how the world works by using all the tools at their disposal: their growing physical skills which enable them to get where they want to go; their thinking skills which help them understand cause-and-effect; and their increasing ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings using gestures, sounds, and even words.

This is also a time when children are just beginning to learn to manage their strong feelings, so tantrums are quite typical; in fact, tantrums are just children's way of expressing their upset given that they have very little self-control at this stage and are not yet able to use words effectively to communicate. At these times, your toddler needs you to be his "rock"—the calmer you are, the more quickly your toddler will recover, move on, and most importantly, learn to manage these difficult feelings—a critical life skill.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Support your child as he practices new skills** like stair-climbing or fitting pieces into a shape-sorter. Provide just the amount of support he needs to master the skill. This builds his confidence.
- **Name the people, places, and things that your child sees each day.** "That's a garbage truck taking away our trash." And build on her interests. If she points to or says "bus", expand on it. "The school bus is driving down the street." This builds language skills.
- **Read, sing together, and make up rhymes and stories.** This builds a love of language and words.
- **Model longer sentences for your child.** When he says, "More milk," you might say: "You want more milk in your cup."
- **Encourage and support your child's efforts to do things for herself.** It is typical for toddlers to insist on doing things by themselves—an important step in their growing independence and self-confidence. You can support your child's goals by finding ways for her to help in the process if it is a task she can't yet accomplish on her own.
- **Build important fine motor—finger and hand—skills** by encouraging scribbling, tapping a toy piano, or holding and waving a bubble wand.
- **Play games that involve following directions.** This is a growing and important skill—understanding and cooperating with instructions. Use actions along with words to help your child understand what you are asking. You might say, "Time to put all the trucks in the basket," as you demonstrate the task.
- **Help your child practice sorting.** Ask your child to help sort the laundry by putting socks in one pile and shirts in another.
- **Provide lots of sensory-rich experiences.** Fill and dump with water or sand. Make an indoor "sandbox" of dry oatmeal or fall leaves.
- **Play games that use problem-solving skills.** Work on three- or four-piece puzzles or building with blocks. Help your child solve the problems he encounters through play, but don't do all the work for him. The more he muscles through a challenge, the more he learns and the more self-confidence he gains.

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Fuel Learning (continued)

- **Encourage the development of your child's maturing thinking and play skills.** Children this age are beginning to play pretend using everyday objects. Provide props like plastic dishes, a toy telephone, or a small dust broom to encourage these developing skills.
- **Join in and expand on your child's play.** If you see your child putting a blanket on her toy bear, ask "Does Teddy need a bottle before bed?"
- **Put your child's feelings into words.** "I know you're really mad that I turned the TV off, but no hitting. Hitting hurts. You can stomp your feet instead."
- **Stay calm during tantrums.** Tantrums are a normal part of toddlerhood as children are learning to manage disappointment, anger, and frustration. The less you react, the more quickly toddlers recover. Take deep breaths, count to 10, or whatever helps you calm yourself. Let your child know you see he is having a hard time and that you will give him the time and space to recover. When he is calm again, move on, sending your child the message that pulling himself together means you can start to engage again.