

## Child development (6) - two to three years

Toddlers between the ages of two and three years are beginning to talk in sentences and sometimes say things in a big and definite voice. We can be tricked into thinking our toddlers are more grown up than they really are. The most important thing to remember is that your two or three year old is still a baby.

### Social and emotional development

Your two year old is learning about relationships, and can sometimes imagine how other people feel (empathy). They know what they want and may appear bossy. 'No' may be one of their favourite words. Other characteristics include:

- Temper tantrums are common in this age group.
- They may play with other children for a short time, but aren't yet capable of true sharing.
- They find it hard to wait or make choices.
- They can't understand reason or control their impulses.
- They love to copy adults, in both appearance and activity.

### Developing understanding

Be careful about your adult talk around your toddler. Their understanding of words is beyond their understanding of the world, so they may become worried by some topics. Introduce the world to them in bits they can cope with. Characteristics include:

- A two year old still thinks their parents can read their mind.
- Two year olds have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy.
- They enjoy make-believe play.
- They can usually do some scribbling, lots of lines, dots and circles, but not yet a picture.

### Physical skills

Your child is much more confident with their physical abilities but doesn't have a good idea of when to stop. They often test limits. They can't keep themselves safe, so you must set and enforce the limits for them. You can help them develop their skill by providing (safe) chances for them to play, while you supervise. Characteristics include:

- They will learn during this time to climb up and down stairs, kick a ball and jump off a step.
- They can help to get themselves undressed and even manage to get some clothes back on.

### Language development

Your toddler's language is developing very quickly. Often, their sentences don't make sense to you, but clearly the more successful your toddler is in getting their message across, the more they will want to communicate. Characteristics include:

- By two, many children are naming lots of things and, by the end of this year, most are saying short sentences.
- By three, most children can follow complex instructions.
- They will still get 'you' and 'me' mixed up sometimes.
- Most children of this age will not be able to say all of their words clearly.

## Toileting

It is usually in this year that your child shows you they are ready to use the toilet. However, some toddlers will still prefer their nappies, or may want to return to nappies if a new baby has come into the family. Suggestions include:

- Let them set their own pace, and encourage them to take responsibility.
- If your child isn't making progress with the potty or toilet, stop for a while and try again when they are older.
- Being anxious or cross makes it harder to go to the toilet. See a health professional if tensions have arisen between you and your child about toileting.

## Suggested activities

Suggestions on encouraging and supporting your child's development include:

- Give them individual attention whenever you can.
- Read aloud to them and talk about the pictures.
- Talk with your child and ask questions about what they are doing. Show a real interest in them.
- Provide toys for stacking, things for pulling apart, blocks, simple jigsaws, toy cars, animals, dolls and so on.
- Provide opportunities for fun on playground equipment, such as slides, sand pits and slippery dips.
- Encourage them in their attempts to explore the world, but keep a firm eye on safety issues.

## Signs that suggest a developmental problem

All children are different and develop at different rates, so if your toddler doesn't do all the things listed in this article, it may be because they are working on some different area of learning and development. However, if your toddler is very different from other children, or if you are worried about their development or it seems to go backwards, seek the advice of a health professional. Signs that could suggest a developmental problem include:

- Frequent tantrums
- Doesn't play with adults or older children
- Doesn't play imagination games
- Is mostly 'in their own world' rather than interacting with others
- Can't run smoothly
- Has a limp
- Is unable to safely climb stairs or onto low furniture
- Can't climb skilfully
- Is far more active or less active than other children the same age
- Is not yet managing to feed themselves most of the time
- Is not using words to let others know what they want
- Is not talking clearly enough for the primary caregiver to know what they want some of the time.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Maternal and Child Health Line, Victoria (24 hour) Tel. 132 229

## Things to remember

- The most important thing to remember is that your two or three year old is still a baby.
- Temper tantrums are common in this age group.

- They may play with other children for a short time, but aren't yet capable of true sharing.
- By two, many children are naming lots of things and, by the end of this year, most are saying short sentences.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Better Health Channel

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright** © 1999/2011 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.