

10 Tips for Parenting Toddlers

By Kaylee Stark

Why do toddlers keep breaking rules? It's helpful to remember their brains are still developing, and impulse control doesn't start to develop until around 3 ½ to 4 years of age, making this developmental stage fun yet challenging. Below are 10 basic tips for parenting toddlers that may aid you through this time.

1. Consider how often you are disciplining. You may need to let some things go. There is an 80/20 Rule you can keep in mind. Eighty percent of the time your interaction with your child is neutral or positive and 20% is for setting boundaries or enforcing a rule.
2. It is important to design your home environment so your child can be successful. For example, store items like books, coats, and toys at your child's level. Have your child help with day-to-day activities like preparing meals, matching socks and cleaning.
3. Repetition helps your child's brain make connections. Repetition helps kids remember things and learn new skills. So next time you are reading the same book for the 20th time, just think about how much your child is learning!
4. Follow your child's lead. This builds parent-child connection. You can do this by watching what your child is doing and joining in (without taking over) or talk about what they are doing without interrupting.
5. Be specific with your praise. Link praise to effort, such as saying: "The way you waited for your snack was wonderful." Use social rewards (hugs and kisses) more than material rewards (toys or candy).
6. Toddlers are less likely to be frustrated or defiant if they feel some control over the situation. Instead of "can you put your shirt on?" a more useful prompt might be: "It is time to put your shirt on. Would you like to wear the red or blue shirt?"
7. Toddlers are starting to feel emotions they never have felt. These feelings are real; take time to acknowledge them. As adults, we struggle with our emotions, so have patience with your child.

Help your child learn words to express himself. Let your child release emotions by running in the yard, throwing a big ball or pounding play dough.

8. You and your child have mirror neurons, also known as empathy neurons. They do exactly what the name implies. They mirror emotions. When your child is having a temper tantrum and is out of control, you also might feel the same way.
9. Toddlers will test you. This is developmentally normal. They are making sense of the world and are naturally curious. When you change rules or become more lenient, it only confuses and frustrates children. Make sure to stay firm with boundaries and consequences. This will create a sense of order and predictability.
10. Use consequences right away. Toddlers, especially, have short attention spans. Act quickly to help them remember what they did that you liked or did not like.

The words you speak to your child often become their inner voice. What they believe, they will become. How can you help your child have a positive internal dialogue?

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