

Communication

Activities to Help Your Toddler Grow and Learn



Your toddler is beginning to enjoy language and words. She has many new words now and is beginning to put two words together for simple sentences. She looks at you when you are talking to her; she says “hi” and “bye,” and she points to things she wants. She also enjoys singing and will try to sing her favorite songs.

Chatter Stretchers

Your toddler may use single words for requests, such as “juice” when he wants a drink. Help him stretch his sentence by saying it for him: “Would you like some juice? Say, ‘I want juice, please.’” Praise him when he attempts to make the sentence longer.

What Happened Today?

When you get home from an outing, ask your toddler to tell someone else about what happened or what the two of you saw: “Tell Grandpa about the horse we saw.” Help her if you need to, but let her tell as much as she can.

“Help Me” Game

Ask your toddler to help you by giving him simple directions, such as “Give Daddy his book,” “Can you get my shoe?” or “Could you bring me a diaper?” You may need to point with your finger to help him in the beginning. Be sure to say, “Thank you,” when he helps.

Animal Sounds

Teach your toddler the sounds that animals make. Read books about baby animals, and play with your toddler by making the baby animal sounds. Later, pretend you are the animal’s parent and your toddler is the baby animal. Call each other with animal sounds. This game can be a lot of silly fun.

Read, Read, Read

Find times to “read” throughout the day. You can point to pictures and words, and your child will begin to learn what words are about. At the grocery store, point to and read signs to your child. At a restaurant, let your child “read” a menu. At home, help her “read” magazines by looking at pictures together and talking about them.

Treasure Box

Put together a treasure box of safe, everyday items that are interesting to explore and feel—plastic cups, a soft sock, a little ball, a hairbrush, a small shoe. When your child pulls something out of the box, say, “Look, you found a soft blue sock” or “That sponge is squishy.” Use new language for your child, and change items in the box every few days.

Notes:



Don't Forget! Activities should be supervised at all times by an adult. Any material, food, or toy given to a young child should be reviewed for safety.

Gross Motor

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By now, your active toddler may be attempting to run. He can carry large items and toys and loves to push and pull big things such as boxes around on the floor. He's learning how to walk upstairs with one hand held by you and is getting better at walking down stairs. He may climb up into a chair to see and reach new things. Your watchful eye is important.

Swinging

Take your child to a playground to swing. Be sure the swing is safe and has a seat belt. Show your child how to push her feet out when swinging forward. Push gently so you know she will hold on. Chant in rhythm while you push: "Up you go, and up you go!"

Climbing the Stairs

Hold your child's hand while you climb up steps or a few stairs. Be patient; stairs are very high for little legs. Don't expect much luck with climbing down just yet. If you don't have any stairs in your house or yard, a playground may have places to practice, such as a small slide or a jungle gym platform.

Balance Beam

With a strip of tape or with chalk, make a line on the floor or outside on the sidewalk. Show your child how to walk along the tape, placing one foot in front of the other. Encourage your child's new skill. Tell him, "You are learning how to balance!"

Chasing

Your toddler is beginning to run now. In a grassy part of your yard or a safe park, play chase with your little one. Most toddlers love to be chased, and they love to be caught and hugged. Your child will love doing this over and over! It's good exercise.

Wagon Pull

Give your child a small wagon or a box with a pull string for hauling toys around. Your child can load the wagon and unload at a different place. Maybe the teddy bear wants to ride!

Playing Music

Your toddler will love making and moving to music. You can make a drum with an oatmeal container, large plastic containers, and wooden spoons or chopsticks. Join her for a little music making. Take turns making music and dancing and moving to different rhythms.

Kickball

Give your child a medium-size ball (6 inches) and show him how to kick it. You can also make a ball from a wad of newspaper taped all around. See how far he can make it go. Kick it and chase it!

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Fine Motor

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Your toddler is becoming more skilled with hands and fingers. She can play with and use toys in many ways, including stacking, poking, pushing, and pulling. She is also gaining skill at holding and using crayons or washable markers. She knows to take apart pieces of a simple puzzle and may try to put the pieces back together.



Tear It Up

After you each wash your hands, show your child how to tear lettuce or spinach leaves into a bowl. Help her tear small pieces just right to eat. Be sure to tell the family who made the salad. Your child also may like tearing strips of magazines or junk mail.

Aim and Drop

Show your little one how to drop a clothespin, spool, or dry pasta (uncooked) into an empty milk jug or plastic container with a large opening. Play the game as long as your toddler enjoys it. Let him shake the container and enjoy the sound.

Stacking Blocks

Let your little one play with small wooden cubes or blocks. Little plastic containers can be washed out and stacked, too. Show her how to stack one on top of another. Build a tower. Count aloud as you stack the blocks so that she begins to hear the sound of numbers. She'll love knocking down the tower.

String a Snack

Give your toddler a small container of round cereal pieces and a piece of string with tape around the end to make it stiff. Show him how to string the cereal. He can wear his necklace or nibble on it!

Place Mats

Make sure your toddler gets lots of chances to practice writing and drawing. You might keep paper and crayons or washable markers in the kitchen so you can keep an eye on her while getting dinner ready. Use drawings for placemats for the family. She will be so proud!

Help Make a Snack

Let your toddler help make a snack. He can unscrew lids from containers such as applesauce once you get the lid loosened. He can help scoop and/or spread butter with a plastic knife. He can also help eat. Yummy!

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Problem Solving

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16-20 months

Your busy learner now recognizes pictures of animals and other pictures, such as pictures of family members. He enjoys a lot of new activities with your help, such as painting and playing with playdough. He is beginning to understand about things that are similar or that go together in some way. He is very curious about how things work.

Copy Cat

On a large piece of paper, draw and scribble together with your toddler. Take turns. You scribble, and then let her scribble. You draw a line, and then let her draw a line. Let her take a turn, and then you copy her scribbles.

Making Things Fit

Allow your child to play with puzzles or toys that fit together or inside each other. Plastic containers that nest are also fun. Use the word *fit* when you can: "That piece *fits* in the puzzle."

Tool Play

Help your child play games or do tasks that use tools. For example, use a sponge to wipe off a chair. Use a strainer and a scoop to play in the sand. Use measuring cups and funnels to fill up containers in the bathtub. Be sure to use the correct names for these items. You'll be surprised at how fast your busy little one learns them.

Match the Socks

When you fold laundry, set aside some of the socks, both large and small. Show your toddler one sock of a pair and let him find the other. Show him how to match the socks if he needs help. Ask him, "Whose big blue socks are these?" and "Where is the other one like this?"

Nature Walk

Go on a neighborhood walk, collecting little things such as rocks and leaves in a small pail or plastic tub. At home, try to put things together into different groups. For example, help your child sort big and little rocks, rocks from leaves, or black rocks from white rocks. Your child will learn about grouping things.

Matching Pictures

Cut out pictures of toys, food, and other familiar objects, and glue them on cards. Have your child try to match cards to actual objects in your home. Show your child a picture of a toothbrush. Ask him, "Where is a toothbrush like this?" Then show him a picture of a chair: "Can you find something like this?"

Notes:



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Personal-Social

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16-20 months

Your toddler is gaining more independence every day. She may show jealousy if others get attention, especially siblings. She is very interested in other children. She likes to do things by herself and may become a little bossy and resist your suggestions. Your good humor will go far in seeing you both through the coming months.

Big Time Mealtime

When the family is at the table for meals, encourage your toddler to eat with his own utensils. He may need a booster seat to reach the table. He can begin to drink from a small plastic cup (just don't fill it to the top). Talk about what a big boy he is.

Family Dancing

Show your toddler how to dance. Play music, and show her how to follow you or dance with you. Invite other family members to dance along. Pick up your toddler and dance with her. Praise your little one. Give her a hug.

Storytime

This is a good time to make a routine of reading stories every night before bed. After getting ready for bed, cuddle up to enjoy a favorite book. It is especially good to read with the television turned off. Your child will hear the words and the expression in your voice. This also might be a special time for another member of the family to read with your toddler.

Comfort Me

Your toddler is busy and often frustrated. He will need a lot of comfort and support to understand his feelings. He responds to what he's feeling right now and does not know that he will feel better in a little while. Give him words for how he is feeling: "You are sad that mom is leaving. I will be back after nap" or "It's really frustrating when you can't get that sock on." He will need your warm voice, a hug, and comfort.

Helping Hands

Your child can begin to help in little ways. She can use a sponge to wipe up the table after dinner. She can put toys or socks in a basket. She will feel good about helping. Let her know you notice: "What a big helper!"

Tickles and Kisses

While getting your toddler ready for bed, say goodnight with a little tickle or kiss to different parts of baby: "Goodnight, little nose [tickle]. Goodnight, little foot [tickle]. Goodnight, little ear [tickle]." Ask him what part needs a goodnight tickle or a goodnight kiss.

Bear Bedtime

Let your child put a doll or stuffed animal to bed. She can help her bear brush his teeth. Read bear a story. Tuck bear in and kiss him goodnight.

Notes:



Don't Forget! Activities should be supervised at all times by an adult. Any material, food, or toy given to a young child should be reviewed for safety. Always watch your toddler during mealtime.