

The Two-Year-Old Child

While the one-year-old child enters the world of walkers and begins to comprehend physical space, the two-year-old enters the world of speech and language and makes an initial foray into social life. Children first repeat what they have heard others say and then practice using those same words in a similar situation. Affirmation by the speakers around them helps them consolidate their learning and soon they will be verbally expressing themselves appropriately in altogether new circumstances.



Development of language is a marvelous process to witness. The personality of the child emerges more clearly as he or she begins to talk. Two-year-olds delight in the sounds of words and take new interest in books. They will talk to and talk for their dolls, toys or other play objects. At a certain point, they will ask repeatedly, "Why?"

Along with language acquisition, two other important developments occur during the third year of a child's life. Parents will notice the first waking up of the feeling life, not the vast ocean of adolescent emotions or even the rolling waves of likes and dislikes of the 7-12 year-olds, but the clear emergence of a much more assertive, "yes" or "no." It is also the case that the frustration at not being able to fully communicate his or her wishes, or not having them met, may bring on whining, crying or even full-blown tantrums. Conflict with playmates may also begin during this stage of development.



The second important development, sometime during the third year, occurs when the child stops referring to him or herself by name or in the third person and says, "I." This is a further step in separation from the environment and towards self-awareness that is necessary for continued development and, in particular, for developing the initial capacity for thinking that will show itself increasingly once the child turns three.

The strong will of the young child combined with the new "yes/no" consciousness will bring parents daily challenges! Being consistent with rhythms, allowing enough time between activities, and making transitions as playful as possible will minimize the potentials for child or parent melt-downs.

Avoid meeting the child's "no" with threats or bribes. Try saying, "**When** you have put on your coat, we can go to the park," rather than saying, "**If** you don't put on your coat we are not going to the park today;" or rather than saying, "**If** you put on your coat now, we can stop at the store and get some graham crackers to take with us to the park."

Use play and imagination to jolly your toddler along. You could say, for example, "Let's put dolly in your pocket, because she might like to go to the park, too." Another possibility would be, "Let's take the dump truck to the sandbox; there might be some digging that needs to be done."

"Do it myself!" Parents of two and three-year-olds will hear this often. Having hooks and shoe racks at child height will help facilitate the desire to learn to dress and undress and also establish the habit of hanging up outer wear and tucking shoes and boots tidily out of the way.

A specific challenge may be new **anxiety about separation** from one or both parents. This may seem to be a regression, but is more likely related to the child's awakening feelings. Again, consistency of routines before and after the time apart is helpful. Also, "practicing" separation for short periods of time (10 or 15 minutes to start with) and saying, "I will come back soon," and then extending the time apart gradually can also be helpful. If

parents are anxious at the time of separation, then the child will be as well. So, the most important support for the child is the parents' inner state of trust and calm.

Difficulty going to bed or to sleep can also be related to the child's not wanting to feel separate and the above suggestions can be easily adapted for nap or nighttime challenges. A predictable bedtime ritual is especially important during this period. A doll, a stuffed animal, or a favorite blanket can be a great comfort to the child in this and other new situations. Some children play with dolls, imitating what they see parents do with younger siblings, but for many children, the doll represents an inner aspect of the child's self and provides the child with a sense of companionship that allows him or her to feel less alone in the journey.

At a certain point, the two-year-old will say "why" many times a day. **How should a parent answer this question?** The child is learning the concept of a question. Another commonly heard question is, "What are you doing?" (This may well be followed by "Why?") The child is not necessarily looking for an answer, but is practicing forming a question. You will naturally answer a simple and concrete question. However, if the question is related to more complex phenomena, alternative responses could be, "hmm," "I wonder why" or "because."

These will be much more helpful than abstract, intellectual explanations that the child is not yet ready to cognize. An imaginative picture as an explanation is more appropriate and satisfying at this age. A simple affirmation of the phenomena, such as "Yes, the trees are dancing with the wind, " may also suffice.

The gift of life with a two-year-old is the joy of communication and companionship.



Links

[T. Atchison, "Making Peace with Toddler Conflict,"](#) from *A Warm and Gentle Welcome* (WECAN 2008)

[D. Udo de Haes, *The Creative Word* Chapters 9-11](#) (WECAN 2014)

Books

[T. Atchison & M. Ris, eds., *A Warm and Gentle Welcome: Nurturing Children from Birth to Age Three*](#) (WECAN 2008)

[S. Howard, ed., *The Developing Child: The First Seven Years*](#) (WECAN 2004)

[A.J. Solter, *Tears and Tantrums: When Do Babies and Children Cry*](#) (Shining State Press 1998)

[D. Udo de Haes, *The Creative Word*](#) (WECAN 2014)