

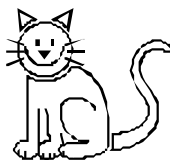
# WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 15 Months

Dear Parents,

Sit down, stand up, walk around, bump, pause, reach, point, walk, toddle, tip, bump, get up, pick up, toss, chase, plop down.....It is endless isn't it? Most 15 month old babies are on the go constantly, and yet some are still beginning to take their first careful steps. In any event, take good care of your back, these next few months involve a lot of lifting, twisting, bending and carrying. Walking around behind a happy new walker is a job in itself and extricating a climber from a tangle of chair legs under the table can make you feel like a pretzel.

**Welcome to the world of the toddler.** Everything is new and exciting. A toddler can't help himself, he just has to move, his legs, his arms, his hands, his fingers. He likes to explore a room and touch the walls and furniture, pick things up, drop them willy-nilly and move on. He follows after you or he goes away from you as if there's a little motor in legs. He likes it if you follow him around while he points to things and he expects you to name what he points to, as if it's your job. Dandelions, rocks, leafy houseplants, they all look good to him. Balls, books, dolls and blocks are favorite toys as well as the contents of any purse or backpack. Whatever you use or play with, he wants. He can work the remote and call Australia on your cell phone. Does the world ever get better than this?

But what about safety? Doesn't this precious little child have any sense? Who is in charge here, anyway?



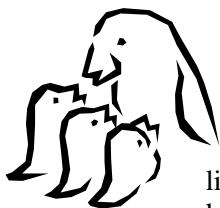
## SETTING LIMITS

You, the parent, are in charge. It might seem otherwise after a long day of toddling around, but **you are the respectful authority** who provides the **safety, boundaries and limits** that your child needs. This is the time to model for your baby how to be both **firm and friendly**. Just as your baby is learning to get a grip on her emotions, you model that it's possible – even when you don't feel like it. Remaining supportive, but detached, during her temper tantrums will help both of you in the long run.

Distracting and redirecting her will work some of the time, but babies this age can be quite intent on getting their own way. Helping them cope with disappointment and frustration, or, as an alternative, find pleasure in another activity can challenge the best of us. And the trick is to be able to follow through quickly and efficiently and “head things off at the pass” so to speak. What this means is being alert to her cues and signals, and what she's trying to tell you in a non-verbal way.

While watching you carefully your toddler may be reaching for something he knows he shouldn't have; but if you aren't watching him, he can quickly make a mess of things or get hurt. When he checks back to see if you *are* watching, that is the time to re-direct him, sing a song, offer a book, show him something outside the window. Babies are connected to you and want to please you. Offer your smiles and encouragement when he's being your “helper.”

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton tells us in his **Touchpoints** book, (Addison-Wesley, 1992) that discipline is the second most important gift you give to your child. The first, of course, is love.



## EMPATHY

Over the course of a very early, lasts a lifetime, parents give their children many gifts, and one that is given As parents you've been modeling and practicing this essential human skill since the moment your baby was born. Every time you've said, “There, there, it's OK, little baby,” when she was upset or hungry or wet, you've given your baby the gentle assurance that you care about her and her feelings. **lifetime, and is established by the time a child is age two, is empathy.**

When you have wiped his tears and put a cool cloth on his bruises, and said soothing, comforting words to him, you've shown your child empathy – **that you can understand his feelings** - and modeled for him how he will eventually be able care for others. When you read a story and say, "Oh, the poor little bunny, is lost," for example, your words show your child how to express empathy and caring for others. From the safety of your lap, your child begins to care about the natural world, animals, people, family. If you have pets, you pat them gently, feed and care for them regularly, all the while showing your child how to care and be responsive to another's needs. When you feed the birds or put a spider outside, you show your love for the natural world.

This 15 – 18 month age is so important and so difficult in some ways. **Your busy, independent toddler has a short attention span** and wants everything right now! Your patience and cheerful, firm style of setting limits can keep you balanced if you remember that you are working not only on short-term goals, but long-term ones as well. You are strengthening the foundation of your relationship with your child. When your child wails in frustration, your response tells her a lot. **Babies need you to be firm, and provide a safe harbor in the storm of their emotions.** When we hear about the "terrible twos" it is often harder on the parents than the child. Our first inclination might be to "give in" to the temper tantrum, but is that what we really want to do?

## TEMPER TANTRUMS

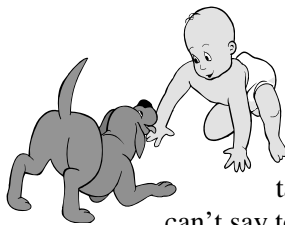
One of our life long tasks as human beings is to learn to control our emotions, but first we have to learn how to express them! And what better time in life to express them than at 15 months with a giant temper tantrum! How do we learn to get a grip on ourselves if every time we are upset, someone either gives in to us, plops a cookie in our mouth, or sits us down in front of a TV or an "educational" video? Think about it.

**Toddlers have short attention spans and because of this, they like routine and predictability.** A schedule sets a pattern in their minds for what to expect. They can be successful if they know what is coming next. Toddlers need to practice again and again how to master new skills. Remember how hard your baby worked learning to roll, sit, crawl and walk? The effort of managing emotions is just as much work. And this is the work of toddlers. Erik Erikson, a wise developmental psychologist, calls this task "autonomy." Or, in the child's mind, it is called, "I want to do it myself." (Get ready, this is going to last a while.)

Your baby is probably not saying those actual words out loud, ("I want to do it myself") but you can bet he's saying them somehow inside his head. Whether it is stacking blocks, struggling to get a truck out of the toy box, learning to walk, feed himself or get in the car seat, he wants to be in charge. Does this mean you should let him be in charge of everything and give in to his every whim? Of course not, but you will care about his feelings when he's frustrated and when he protests you can re-direct him and offer him another activity. Babies this age who like to walk can often just be turned around to head in a different direction like one of those little wind-up toys; everything doesn't need to be a battle. You just need to be persistent and attentive and willing to step back when he sobs dramatically, and mean business when it's time to put on his shoes or get him in the car seat.

## LANGUAGE

One of the factors that influence temper remember, she is only 15 months old! She let me play with your crystal vase and turn the stove buttons on and off, and I feel so frustrated when you tell me I can't play in the trash and splatter in the dog's water bowl. Darn." But why, when you say, "No!" does she go back and do it again and again? She does it again and again because she likes **repetitive play**, and she knows she can get your attention. It is your attention that keeps her safe.



tantrums is your toddler's language ability - can't say to you, "Oh, I am so disappointed that you won't

Babies this age are nearing a big burst in language development and they are happy when you give names to things, either at home, in the car, the store or in a book. If you think your baby wants everything on the store shelves, try naming what you see: apple, banana, truck, doll, bread. Pointing and wiggling fingers don't necessarily mean, "Give me," but can mean, "Tell me what it is." Repetition and copying is how we learn, it is how we learn to speak.

Because babies have short attention spans they like things repeated again and again, whether it is a game of peek-a-boo, a nursery rhyme or song, or - playing in the dog's dish.

Naming what your child sees and describing what she is doing is one way to give her attention. "Oh, look, you are putting the blocks in the box; you are showing me the little red truck; what a nice truck, thank you." Short simple sentences that describe what she is doing give your child positive attention – and it's quite easy. You can still be cooking dinner or reading the paper and carry on a "conversation" with your sweet toddler.

You may find it hard to read a whole book to your toddler and he may move quickly from page to page, but he's listening. Keep reading and pronouncing the words and don't be discouraged by the speedy page turning. Songs work well at this age, especially while changing diapers and in the car.

## PLAYTIME

Parents are the best people to play with and one way to entertain your toddler is to have him help you. Sorting laundry is great fun! The chores you do aren't chores to the child, they are play and opportunities for learning new words. He likes balls, boxes, paper, water play (make sure you are right there with him) and the telephone; he likes looking out the window, bringing in the mail and dragging things around. He wants to help you. This is the beginning of imagination and pretending. His job is to copy you (and to keep you moving)! If you have a toddler following you around it takes a lot longer to get things done, especially if you are following *him* around. Just when you think he's there, off he goes. Play on the move: pick it up, put it down, flip it over, turn around, inside out, upside down.



It might be tempting to use videos or television to settle things down, but a nap for you and your toddler is far preferable. Try not to let her get over-stimulated: regularly scheduled nap times can keep you both in better balance. If bedtime becomes difficult, try moving the time for bed 15 minutes earlier. Watch for signs of sleepiness and get her headed to bed before she has a "meltdown." Almost everything is play to a toddler, and that is why you as gentle parent, teacher, guide and model are so important. You set the schedules. You keep her safe.

Books your baby might enjoy are ones with bright photos of real things, other babies, faces, animals or toys. Since this is a time of learning words, your baby likes to point and have you tell him what he sees. You can make a little photo album for him with pictures of family members, pets, the car and favorite toys and food. He'll like the familiar pictures and want to see them again and again. Here are some suggestions:

**Hello, Lulu**, Caroline Uff, Walker and Co., New York, 1999.

Also by Caroline Uff, are **Happy Birthday, Lulu** and **Lulu's Busy Day**.

**Mr. Gumpy's Outing**, John Burningham, Henry Holt and Co., 1970.

**Who Says Quack?** Jerry Smith, A Pudgy Book.



**If you have questions about parenting or your child's development, please call 360-419-3324.  
We'll be happy to do some research for you and connect you to any resources that might be helpful.**

**WELCOME BABY! "warm-line" 360-419-3324**

WELCOME BABY! is a parent support and education program available to families of **all** children, birth to age, three in Skagit County. WELCOME BABY! is sponsored by Skagit County Public Health, Skagit Valley Hospital, Island Hospital, Kiwanis, Rotary, Friends of Welcome Baby & Baby Talk and United Way of Skagit County.

*Best wishes from Friends of Welcome Baby, watch for another newsletter when your baby is 18 months old.*