

# WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 18 Months

## Dear Parents,

Every experience your eighteen-month-old has is educational. We might just as well say, every experience you have with your eighteen-month-old is educational for you! Because your busy toddler is not yet motivated by the joys of cooperation, he may seem to do just the opposite of what you are asking him to do. You'll say, "Come over here," and he'll go the other way. You may try to get him in his car seat and he'll arch his back and scream in protest. Then you'll take him out of the car – because your back is killing you – and he'll wave and smile at some stranger as if he's the happiest baby in the world.

So you'll try to get him back in the car seat and the cycle of protest will start all over again. It is almost as if it is your toddler's job to do the opposite of what you want him to. And his body is so busy! How can such short little legs run so fast? And then when you think you'll fall down from exhaustion, he'll snuggle into your arms and you'll feel so full of love and tenderness you can't believe it; then up and off again, he's ready to explore.

This is the age when parents resort to all sorts of tricks, distractions and enticements because the word "no" seems so useless. Your little girl will come running if something sounds interesting: try crinkling paper, ringing a little bell, or clinking kitchen pans. Because she wants to explore and do everything at once, various distracting tricks often work like magic. This 18 month-old time is the start of a great burst in language learning, but the big concepts of safety and "who is boss", still don't have a lot of meaning for her. *But in her mind, remember, she's the boss!* With this little firecracker, how do you stay sane and keep her safe?

## SAFETY

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton in his book, *Touchpoints*, (Perseus Books, 1992), says, "All the fearless, rambunctious, insatiable energy of a toddler has to be both celebrated and contained." What does this mean for you?

Your precious toddler is working very hard right now learning many things all at once - just walking and talking are monumental. But, add running, climbing, words, sentences, following directions, tasting new foods, eating with a spoon, watching out for cars, getting back in the stroller after fun in the park...it is a long list. Then if one adds new experiences: going on an airplane, a boat ride, watching fireworks, being dunked in a swimming pool, going to daycare, getting a new baby sister, it's a lot. But wait! There's more!

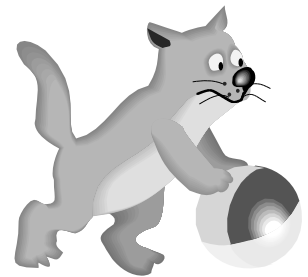
Here are the main themes or tasks that your 18 month-old is working on:

**Autonomy:** *I want to do it myself!*

**Impulse control:** *I want it now!*

**Separation:** *If you leave me, will you come back?*

**Sexual identity:** *Am I a boy or a girl?*



That's quite a list of tasks for an 18 month-old and because your child *is* only 18 months old, his experiences can be quite intense. He's learning all the time! **It is because he's working on autonomy and impulse control that keeping him safe is so necessary.** It is as though his very behavior forces you to pay attention. Trying to master any new task requires much trial and error and is cause for a lot of frustration. There's no ignoring a toddler at this age. Gates, sturdy crib rails, closed doors, cupboard door locks can be life saving.

## EMOTIONS

Remember how hard your baby worked learning to roll over, sit up, crawl, stand and walk? Mastering physical skills requires coordination, strength and balance. Mastering emotions requires different skills: listening, patience, cooperation, giving, sharing, impulse control. These are big concepts for an 18 month-old.

Learning how social relationships work requires much practice on a child's part and even more patience, comfort and encouragement from parents. When you are in a power struggle with your toddler over putting on her shoes or

getting her in the car seat, it is important not only to get the job done, but also to understand her great emotional struggle. **She wants to please herself and please you at the same time.** The long-term goal is cooperation, but mastering it often messy and tearful.

Remaining firm, kind and patient as you acknowledge your toddler's desire for independence - "*I want to do it myself*" - gives him a model for how people learn to get along. His job is to get a grip on his emotions.

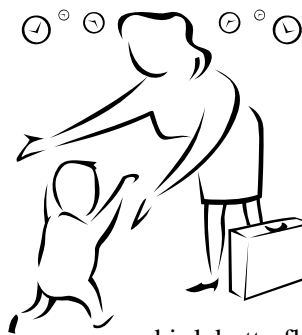
When your toddler wants something right away, **learning to manage the feeling of patience is what impulse control is all about.** We remain right beside him and care about his feelings even when we must set limits.



But what happens when you can't remain beside him? What happens when you leave him or need to take him to childcare? This **separation** from you can be very difficult for some toddlers who scream and cry in protest. Separating from you might go easily one day and be a nightmare the next. It can almost seem like he's punishing you. But look at this from his perspective: he loves you and you are his whole world.

Children this age hold you in their minds when they are separated from you and this takes a lot of energy. When you return from work at the end of the day, your child is so happy to see you that she might fall apart in tears. It is a great emotional relief that you are back again. All day she has been working: trying to cooperate with teacher, trying to share with playmates, figuring out what taking turns means. No wonder she bursts into tears when she sees you! Every time you reassure her that you will be back, she builds her confidence in you.

Your relationship with your child deepens and grows when you provide the warmth and security she needs when she's asking you for it. Finding the balance between holding her close, keeping her safe and letting her find her independence is a major task of much of childhood and it is at its most intense for an 18 month-old.



## LANGUAGE

New words are wonderful! Naming things: bird, butterfly, boots, cup, car, cheerio, dog, fence, mailbox, pineapple, snow, duck, train, daisy, moon...the list of nouns goes on and on. If a child this age is pointing at things a lot, chances are she wants you to name what she is pointing to. Simple word phrases help her make sense of her busy, busy world. Even though you use the word "share" it doesn't mean your toddler understands. Just like the word "potty" it is too early to expect mastery of these big ideas. But as parents, we put the words out there, so that over time, the child can learn what our expectations are.

Books with clear bright photographs or drawings of real things are wonderful. Toddlers like to see what is in their natural world. Reading together is a wonderful way to cuddle first thing in the morning, before naps and bedtime. Turning pages might still be the most fun. Try to resist the temptation to let your child watch television. Remember,

he learns the most from copying what he sees. He wants to be your helper and your pal. He will love songs with hand movements and gestures, songs like, “The Wheels on the Bus” and the “Itsy Bitsy Spider”.

## DISCIPLINE

So, why if she is so interested in learning new words, doesn't she get it when you say, “Stay out of the street!” ? Toddlers this age still haven't developed clear ideas of danger. With an 18 month-old, we need to be paying attention all the time. Discipline is most effective when it is a cooperative effort between you and your toddler. Ha! You feel like saying. But that is the goal and it takes a lot of practice and trial and error. One daddy said, “Toddlers need to be under your voice control.” What does that mean? Practice using the word, “Stop!” Sometime it is more effective than the word, “No”. A way to learn this is to play little game; it goes like this:

We are clapping, clapping, clapping and we stop!  
We are clapping, clapping, clapping and we stop!  
We are clapping, clapping, clapping, and we're clapping, clapping, clapping,  
We are clapping, clapping, clapping and we stop!

Then you can add other actions like waving, walking, or running, dancing, wiggling.....and we STOP!

## PLAYTIME

Safety, emotions and discipline are only one part of living with a toddler: the best part is PLAY! The work of children is play, copying what you do, messing about with pots and pans, being a helper. Letting little children “help” with chores accomplishes a number of things: First, you know where your child is, he is right beside you so you can keep an eye on him; secondly, he is learning language and skills; and thirdly, it gives him activities to work out in play. For children, unless we tell them, they don't know they are doing chores. Remember, everything in the right spirit is play to a young child. Play is how children “work out” who they are and how the world works.

This is age when **pretend** play begins. A stick of wood can become a truck, a row of blocks can become a train. A jar lid can be a cup to “feed the baby”. A little wooden train set is fun for this age and some toddlers are ready to enjoy trying to fit the pieces together to make a train track. Other toddlers like to play house with little kitchen things, or a small tea set. Boxes, balls, blocks, a doll, books, a few little cars, some big crayons and newsprint paper, it doesn't need to be more complicated than this. The key is for parents to stand by and when the tower of blocks falls over, to be there with surprise, encouragement, and to help build it again.

When looking for toys for toddlers, remember, it is not the amount of toys that matters, it is the **amount of imagination the child can use when he plays with things** that is important. Stores are full of bright plastic toys that beep, squeak, squeal and sing; however, children can easily become bored and parents annoyed with them. An investment in a set of smooth wooden blocks can last a whole childhood and provide endless hours of imaginative play. A big empty cardboard box is a wonderful toy for a long rainy afternoon.



This is a nice time to introduce your toddler to other children especially if she hasn't had a chance to play with others, but it can also be a reminder of just how hard your child is working on her “autonomy”. She won't want to share! Everything is “mine” – even what is yours! It is almost impossible to leave two toddlers alone together and expect any kind of cooperative play, they need your guidance and supervision almost constantly. Children this age play beside one another, not really with one another. Group activities and classes are often best at this age. **Doing things with your toddler helps model how to get along with others.**

This 18 month-old age is a time of big transition. Please don't hesitate to give our **WELCOME BABY! line (360-419-3324)**, a call with any questions you might have about parenting or your child's development. Our service, sponsored by Skagit County Public Health is free to **all** families of children birth to age three.

*Best wishes from WELCOME BABY! Please watch for another newsletter when your child is 21 months old.*

**MUSICAL DISCOVERY TODDLER** groups are available in Mount Vernon, Anacortes and Sedro-Woolley. Please call for a schedule. 360-419-3324.

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

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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 21 months old.*