

WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 24 Months

Dear Parents,

Two years old so soon! How wonderful! This age can be delightful and parents often find that their two year old is much more likely to listen and follow along than she was six months ago. Your child's behavior is probably more organized now, her language and motor skills have improved, and sometimes she seems almost cooperative.

By now you are learning that your child's behavior seems to move through various stages. It is as though a period of calm and balance is followed by a time of emotional upheaval and distress, to say nothing of a lot of bouncing on the sofa. And then, as if by magic, your child enters another stretch of relatively smooth behavior. This is all part of learning. From now through much of childhood, you'll find that behavior patterns will almost follow a six-month cycle. Perhaps not in actuality, but it might feel that way. It helps to know that as your child struggles to master new skills that this very struggle is her work, and the issues she's working on are not all your fault. She works things out in her play.



Parenting is your work, and at times it is just as confusing and then, all of sudden things seem to come together. In our relationships with our children, we examine our own behavior and see how it affects our child's behavior. (It's not a bad tool for any relationship, actually.)

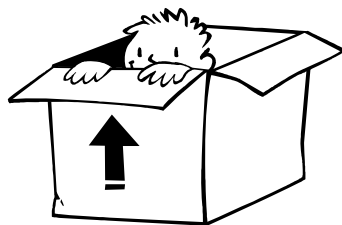
Is what we are doing working? This is the same question your child asks while he's playing, not in so many words, but listen to him. While he's playing quietly with a toy, does he talk through what he's doing? When he lies in bed trying to fall asleep, does he talk through the events of his day?

LANGUAGE



Language ability at this age can vary tremendously from child to child. Some children can speak in short sentences while others prefer to point and expect you to do the work. When he says, for example, "Let's go park." You can respond by saying a longer version of the same sentence. "You'd like us to go to the park?" By asking a question, you can extend the conversation. You can encourage his vocabulary by saying words clearly for him. If he is saying, "nan-nah" you say it clearly, "Do you want the banana?" If he just nods, you give the appropriate response, "Yes, please," in the tone of voice you want him to use. With language learning, it is the same as with behavior, he will copy you – eventually. Monkey see, monkey do.

Of course, every time you read to your two year old, you are helping him build his vocabulary and his concept of the world around him. This is a great time to enjoy trips to the library. You needn't be a member of the library to attend the Story Times, just go and have fun. It is also a great time to visit one of our Musical Discovery Toddler groups. Please call for a schedule, 360-419-3324. Singing is a wonderful booster for all of language development. When you and your toddler learn the same songs together you get a magic tool for getting his attention. Songs can help calm him down, perk him up, help him transition from one activity to another: from house to car, from kitchen to bath, or bath to bed, or to the imaginary "zoo in the park" where you can all jump like monkeys.



PLAYTIME

Imagine if you tried to do everything your toddler does with things and furniture in the same proportion to you as they are to him (a sofa high as your shoulder). Could you keep up? *Climb, jump, run, fall down, get up, climb up, jump jump jump, fall down, howl, get up, climb up, jump jump jump, slide down...* Big muscle play, trying to get that body to do what it wants to do. And here again, there are huge differences in children's abilities and strength. Your child may have some developmental issues and it is important to be cautious when comparing him to another. Or your two year old may be quick and agile and imitating the older boys he sees through

the window across the street and you'll need to watch him like a hawk to keep him safe. Wherever your child is developmentally, you can bet he's working very hard at play to figure things out.

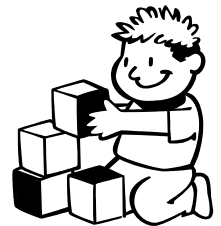
Even though the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television until a child is two, it doesn't mean to give in at age two and turn it on all day. Of course your child likes to watch certain programs and videos, but plain-old-plain **play** is best. Play helps your toddler concentrate, it is her work, it is the joy of being two! Try to limit TV to no more than half an hour once a day. Watching too much television can be exhausting.

A trip down the aisle of a toy store is very tempting, but remember, **a child's imagination is a wonderful thing!** When we haven't got something we make it up; it is what children – and inventors and artists – have done since the beginning of time. **Play is the garden of the imagination** and in the next few years that garden will grow and bloom and blossom. Toys, like a set of blocks, provide endless entertainment; a little train set, some balls, cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes, dolls and dolly blankets, a tea set, big crayons and sheets of newsprint paper, a sandbox, cars and trucks, a little shovel. Toys needn't be expensive or complicated. What to look for are simple things that can be used again and again as language grows and the imagination lights up.



DISCIPLINE

In her book, Children First, Penelope Leach says that self-discipline for a child is “a slow-growing plant” that has its roots in a child's identification with her parents or caretakers. If we remember that the purpose of discipline is to teach - and we have unlimited patience - (but does anyone have endless patience?) - *we can do the best we can*. We must forgive ourselves when we can't, and try to model again and again, by tone of voice and gentleness of spirit how to behave well. It is helpful to remember that **a two year old is trying everything for the first time** and the world is new and exciting everyday. Trying to get a demanding two year old, her body, mind and spirit to understand a concept like “hurry” or “hurry, hurry, we'll be late” is not easy.



Far better to suggest one thing at a time, “Can you bring me your socks, please?”

For your child, learning how to behave depends a great deal on the warmth of your relationship with him. You can have strict rules and clear expectations, but what matters in the long run, and will get to good behavior sooner, is the quality of your overall interaction. Then, when you need to be firm and mean business, or set limits to put a stop to aggressive or unsafe activity, you will have a respectful base from which you operate.

When children have an authority figure – you as parent or caretaker – respectful and respected, loving and loved, good behavior is something even a highly active and busy toddler can aspire to. His behavior may be worse with you than with anyone else, but he knows that he is safe with you. After all, he needs to try out his emotional experiments with someone.

MEALTIME and SLEEPYTIME



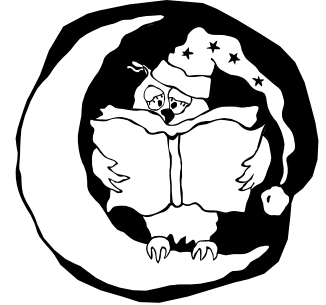
Mealtime is still messy. Some children sit down and manage a spoon with delicacy. Others get their photos taken with noodles all over their head. Learning to manage fork, spoon, peas, yams and beans, or bits of chicken when you are hungry, tired, and fussy isn't easy. Falling apart at dinnertime can happen easily if there is too much pressure to do everything right. Some parents, neat and tidy themselves with excellent table manners, adopt a casual philosophy around mealtime called, “whatever works”.

If your child falls apart before dinnertime, think about feeding her earlier. Much the same can be said about bedtime. Start getting ready for bed earlier. Family rituals around meals and bedtime help two year olds feel secure. A predictable routine is something they can count on. You might find that if you miss a step in your routine, a little voice pipes up and you need to start all over again and get the sequence right.

This insistence on things always the same way, again and again, can get on grownup's nerves. But by the same token, it can make things simpler. The world is very wide to a two year old and narrowing it down to the same thing at the same time in the same place, kind of keeps a person in line. It won't last forever, but it is an important step to managing one's day.

Another part of managing one's day is to get to bed early oneself. Often parents of two year olds are so exhausted that they fall asleep reading the same old story even before the child does.

*The moon is round as round can be
It has two eyes, a nose and a mouth you see.
And best of all, it loves to be
Snuggled close and reading to thee...*



Books your child might enjoy include the **Little Bear Books**, one of which is To Grandmother's House, by Else Holmelund Minarik, Harper Festival, New York, 2002. The books by Nadine Bernard Westcott have great rhythmic rhymes and include: The Lady with the Alligator Purse, Miss Mary Mack, and Skip to My Lou, Little Brown and Company, Boston, New York, London.

Another good book you might find at your library is Over in the Meadow, by Ezra Jack Keats; this was first Published in 1971 by Four Winds Press and again in 1999, by Viking and Puffin Books. And almost any book by Lois Ehlert is wonderful. Here's a little song from Animal Crackers to sing while walking:

*Here we go to the zoo in the park, the zoo in the park, the zoo in the park,
Here we go to the zoo in the park, so early in the morning.
This is the way the kangaroo hops, the kangaroo hops, the kangaroo hops,
This is the way the kangaroo hops, so early in the morning.**

This is the way the birdie flies....the elephant walks... the monkey jumps....
by Jane Dyer

*from Animal Crackers, by, Little Brown and Company, Boston, New York, London, 2002.



The Swallow

Fly away, fly away, over the sea,
Sun loving swallow, for summer is done.
Come again, come again, come back to me,
Bringing the summer and bringing the sun.

Christina Georgina Rossetti

REFERENCES

Touchpoints, by T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., Perseus Books, Reading, Massachusetts, 1992.

Children First, by Penelope Leach, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1994.

Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, by Marc Weissbluth, M.D., Fawcett Book, New York, 1999.

Child Behavior, by Frances L. Ilg, M.D., Louise Bates Ames, Ph.D., Sidney M. Baker, M.D., Harper Collins, New York, 1981.

Best wishes from WELCOME BABY! Please watch for another newsletter when your child is 24 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 30 months old.