



Social Emotional Development

Social interaction is far and away the most important form of stimulation a baby receives. A sensitive caregiver is able to stimulate all of a baby's senses as well as to build feelings of trust and emotional security. The ways in which you touch, hold, feed, talk to and look at a baby all provide important input to his developing brain. Remember that children also need time out from stimulation. They may need help falling asleep at naptime.

The most significant emotional milestone during the second six months (and perhaps, in all of child development) is the onset of attachment: babies' powerful bond to the most significant person in their lives (usually Mom or Dad). There is some evidence that the onset of attachment is associated with a spurt in brain (frontal lobe) development over this same 6-12 month age range.

Stranger anxiety is the counterpoint to attachment: once babies recognize and prefer their primary caregiver(s), they become wary of adults who are not familiar. Most babies begin to show signs of "separation protest" (fussing when Mom or Dad leaves their sight) or "stranger fear" (a shy or anxious response to approach by someone unfamiliar) by seven or eight months of age.

At one point, it seemed this little baby would go to anyone. Now, as an older infant, he looks scared and worried when a stranger approaches. Some older infants will be openly affectionate and outgoing with a caregiver, but become clingy, fearful, and upset around strangers. They want the familiar caregiver to be in constant sight. Although this is stressful, it is a sign that a baby is developing as expected. Stranger awareness/anxiety is very typical in older infants. It means a baby can tell people she knows from people she doesn't. Older infants now understand that you still exist even when you leave the room and he can no longer see you. A baby may even be clingy when you try to go to the bathroom. At about one year of age, babies begin to make many connections between objects and events. When seeing you put on a coat, the baby may start to cry, realizing your departure is close at hand.

- Using simple words to describe a baby's concern such as, "You look worried I'm going bye-bye," can help. Talking to baby about where you are going and what you will do when you get back can help a baby prepare for your departure.
- Have a supply of books that you and baby have enjoyed together, ready for another caregiver to use. Books with pictures of familiar actions and objects are the ones older babies usually like best. If the pictures are not familiar objects and events, the books may not have much appeal for a baby.
- When an older baby is left with an unfamiliar caregiver, a little extra time in the arrival routine can help a child get involved in an activity such as looking at books, doing finger plays, or singing simple songs with the new caregiver present.
- Parents should give a warning to the infant, when ready to leave, and be sure to say goodbye. Trying to sneak out without letting a baby know may result in making the next separation harder, because the baby will try to pay very close attention to where his parent is, thinking that he or she might slip off again without his knowing it.
- Try using books with goodbye themes.

45 Bartlett Crescent

Brookline MA 02446

www.parentsinapinch.com

617.739.KIDS

800.688.4697

617.793.1939 fax



Toddlers: Along with this increasing awareness of self come issues of ownership and sharing-or more accurately not sharing. It seems at times that possessiveness overtakes toddlers as they constantly claim many objects and toys as their own. In fact, this focus on ownership may be one way in which the toddler comes to reach a better understanding of himself or herself, as a distinct person from others.

Claiming possession of toys and other objects is also a way for toddlers to express their growing independence and autonomy. Once you think of their possessiveness in terms of these two issues-identity and autonomy-it becomes easier to understand why toddlers seem to be so selfish during this age period. There is hope, however: once most toddlers have been allowed to become more secure in knowing what is and is not theirs, they begin to more readily consider sharing with others.

Self-control-which is also just beginning at this age-also plays a role in this task of sharing. Most toddlers can wait for just a few seconds in the presence of a much-desired object. Although they probably understand you when you tell them not to take from others, they have great difficulty stopping themselves from doing it. This self-control comes with time and brain maturation, and in particular, development of the frontal lobes of the brain. This area of the brain is really beginning to work in a meaningful way in the second year, and will continue to mature throughout childhood and adolescence!

What you can do:

- Understand "toddler development" and be tolerant in your expectations of sharing.
- Provide lots of guidance. Initiate games of sharing and turn taking. Understand that toddlers are less willing to be compliant when they are tired or not feeling well.
- Use distraction or redirection to calm or avoid disputes.
- Have their favorite toys available in greater quantities.
- Model pro-social behavior, sharing behavior in your everyday interactions with children, parents and other staff.
- Have a special, private place for cherished toys that can be used without fear of others taking them.

There are several things going on developmentally during this 18 to 24 month period that may make it difficult for toddlers to share with others and to do what they are asked. Around 18 months of age toddlers display signs that they are developing an awareness of self. One of the signs of this growing awareness is the discovery that there is not only a "me," but also a "mine" (Pruett, 1999). These are two words that may appear often in the toddler's speech - e.g. "me do" & "mine" or "my car". these two issues-identity and autonomy-it becomes easier to understand why toddlers seem to be so selfish during this age period. There is hope, however: once most toddlers have been allowed to become more secure in knowing what is and is not theirs, they begin to more readily consider sharing with others.



Self-control-which is also just beginning at this age-also plays a role in this task of sharing. Most toddlers can wait for just a few seconds in the presence of a much-desired object. Although they probably understand you when you tell them not to take from others, they have great difficulty stopping themselves from doing it. This self-control comes with time and brain maturation, and in particular, development of the frontal lobes of the brain. This area of the brain is really beginning to work in a meaningful way in the second year, and will continue to mature throughout childhood and adolescence!

What you can do:

- Understand "toddler development" and be tolerant in your expectations of sharing.
- Provide lots of guidance. Initiate games of sharing and turn taking. Understand that toddlers are less willing to be compliant when they are tired or not feeling well.
- Use distraction or redirection to calm or avoid disputes.
- Have their favorite toys available in greater quantities.
- Model pro-social behavior, sharing behavior in your everyday interactions with children, parents and other staff.
- Have a special, private place for cherished toys that can be used without fear of others taking them.

Being confined, being controlled, and having things done for them when they would rather do it themselves, are all actions toddlers may resist. In addition, they may also resist things like being bundled up in uncomfortable clothing if they are sensitive to touch. Unfortunately, the desire to "do it myself" often comes well before the ability to do it. Mix this with the popular "No" word and interactions with toddlers can be difficult. Toddlers who are craving independence may resist if something is done or chosen for them. The good news is that, like other phases young children go through, toddlers will eventually learn more effective ways to get their needs and wants met.

Toddlers love to look at books on their own; it helps them feel independent. Keeping books on low shelves, in an open box or basket on the floor helps toddlers to reach them without help, fostering their ability to "do it self." Books can also be made available in different places such as in a book bag that goes to childcare, in the bathroom, in the car, or next to a toddler's bed.

When the desire to "do it myself" comes well before the ability to actually do it, the resulting frustration can set off a tantrum. Some strategies to encourage independence while avoiding tantrums are as follows:

- Provide choices. Keep choices down to two or three since too many options can overwhelm and frustrate a toddler. Compliment your toddler on suitable choices made, and try not to criticize when, from your point of view, the choice may be misguided.
- Keep a sense of humor. Making light of things will help to keep both of you less stressed. Help to "tame the beast" with a game to help reduce the resistance and redirect the action. "Hey, I can't find your fingers, where could they be?"
- Distract the child with an interesting book, song, or toy BEFORE trying to do something you know he will resist, such as dressing or being strapped into his car seat.
- Take a positive approach. Try saying, "Please stay on the sidewalk," rather than "Don't walk in the mud."



Along with this increasing awareness of self come issues of ownership and sharing-or more accurately not sharing. It seems at times that possessiveness overtakes toddlers as they constantly claim many objects and toys as their own. In fact, this focus on ownership may be one way in which the toddler comes to reach a better understanding of himself or herself, as a distinct person from others.

Claiming possession of toys and other objects is also a way for toddlers to express their growing independence and autonomy. Once you think of their possessiveness in terms of holding an object, throwing a ball, waving good-bye, etc., along with an emerging preference in leg use when they are hopping on one foot or kicking a ball.

Toddlers must be taught to express themselves verbally, to "use their words" to express their feelings and talk about them. This does not come spontaneously. You need to help toddlers learn to do this by reading their cues and helping them identify their feelings and behaviors so that they learn to associate words with those feelings and behaviors. For example, when a toddler is smiling you comment, "I can tell you are happy. You have such a big smile on your face." Or when a child hits another for taking his toy you say, "Hitting is not allowed. If you are angry with Jon for taking your car, use your words and tell him you're angry."

Inhibiting impulses also requires maturation of thinking skills. In fact, inhibition involves several steps. In order to inhibit impulses children need to first know the rule involved (e.g., No grabbing an object from another child.) and then understand that the rule applies to a particular situation (No taking the toy from Jimmy.). They need to be able to shift and control their attention from what they want to the expected behavior (Susie wants the truck, but she shouldn't take it from Jimmy.). Finally, children need to be able to think of alternatives to their behavior (Instead of taking the truck from Jimmy, Susie can see if there are more on the shelf or wait until Jimmy is done playing with it and have a turn, etc.).

While 2-3 year-olds are certainly better at inhibiting troublesome behavior than they were at 18 months, they are still far from mastering control of their impulses. While the brain is developing the capacity to control impulses, care providers can support the skills that are emerging and supply the help needed. Catching problems before they fully emerge allows care providers to guide children's behavior. For example, if Susie is looking as if she is about to take Jimmy's truck, a care provider might say, "Susie, you seem to want to play with Jimmy, are there any more trucks on the shelf?"

As a care provider, it is important that you are aware of the strength of emotions, the development of thinking and problem solving skills, and the difficulty toddlers may have in controlling their impulsive behaviors. You can help them learn how to control aggressive behaviors by being attentive to their play and interactions, by helping them identify, label, and connect their emotions with actions, and by helping them find more appropriate solutions when conflicts arise.



What you can do:

- Close observation of toddlers allows providers to anticipate when a particular child is having (or about to have) trouble and intervene before an aggressive act occurs.
- Help toddlers identify their feelings and label them with words such as angry, upset, happy, and sad.
- Help toddlers connect their feelings with their actions, for example, "Sally, it is not okay to hit Nina. I see you are angry. It is okay to be angry, but it is not okay to hit."
- Remember that toddlers are not skilled at adapting to the demands of others and thus may need help from an adult to guide their behaviors. For example, when David wants the pounding toy that Sam is playing with, you might say to David, "When Sam is finished, you can have it." Then turn to Sam and say, "It will be David's turn pretty soon."
- Offer a variety of strategies that the toddler can use in frustrating situations, especially words, gestures, and asking for help.
- State clear consequences in relation to a toddler's behavior. For example, "You may not take the blocks away from Inez. You may ask her to give you some. If you take them away from her without asking, you will have to leave the block area."
- Try not to think of the child as "good" or "bad," or "cooperative" or "uncooperative." Try to show your acceptance of the toddler even as you redirect unacceptable behavior. Tell her you like or love her even though you do not like the way she is behaving. Try to set up situations that will help toddlers use their developing social skills to the best of their abilities.

There is a lot going on in toddlers' development between 2-3 years that contributes to their difficulty in controlling aggressive responses. Two-year-olds are still highly involved with their emerging sense of self - figuring out "Who am I?" and defining themselves over and over with the word "Mine!" While older toddlers have more interest in their peers than they did at 18 months, they are still most interested in pleasing themselves and cannot yet understand another child's perspective. It is not unusual for toddlers of this age to be verbally and physically aggressive in their play with objects and peers.

Along with this self-interest comes the continued development of toddlers' emotions, such as anger and frustration - which mainly appear in the form of rage and defiance. Toddlers begin to feel shame along with wariness, or anxiety, and continue to develop emotions of fear, pleasure, pride, and joy. It is not unusual for them to express anger and frustration by hitting, kicking, shoving, or biting. Learning to recognize these emotions, connect them to their behavior, and to gain control over that behavior is an ongoing process.

Language is another important factor to consider in understanding aggressive toddler behavior at this age. While this is a period of tremendous growth in expressive language, not all toddlers are as verbally skilled as others at this age. Some may not yet have the words they need to express their feelings and frustrations. Others may have the words, but are not yet able to connect the feelings and behaviors they experience. Because of differences in expressive language, we need to pay attention to the nonverbal cues and communication of toddlers to help them connect words with feelings and with actions.