

YOUR TWO YEAR OLD

Congratulations! You have survived the “terrible twos” – the second year of your child’s life during which time your child was developing his own identity, exploring the world, and struggling to control his own behavior. During the third year of life, your child will rapidly expand her knowledge of the world, become more competent and develop a sense of gender identity / sexuality through play and imitation.

NUTRITION

Your child will not gain much weight during this year, so expect his appetite to decrease. A few hints:

1. Develop the habit of eating at least one or two meals a day together as a family.
2. Meal times should be fun – a time for you to share your ideas, experiences and feelings.
3. Remember to offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains while expecting your child to be quite picky. If your child sees you making healthy food choices, she will learn to do the same later on.
4. Consider giving your child a once daily multivitamin / mineral chewable tablet every day. (Parents may benefit from a multivitamin also as most people in America are deficient in Vitamin D.)
5. Try to avoid junk food, fast food, fried food, and unhealthy saturated fats.

DENTAL

You should be brushing your child’s teeth at least once a day – especially at night before bedtime. Please do NOT use toothpaste with fluoride. If you do use toothpaste, buy a children’s paste that does not contain fluoride. Your child should see a pediatric dentist between 2 and 2 ½ years of age. (Dental visits are very different for children now – and most children really enjoy their visit.) You can read a book to your child like *The Berenstain Bears visit the Dentist* to help prepare your child – or let him go with you to your own visit.

TOILETING

Most children are toilet trained during the third year of life. It is very important to let your child decide when she is ready and then you can encourage her attempts. Never force your child to sit on the potty seat or toilet – this will only cause your child to further resist toileting. If your child is interested, is telling you when his diaper needs to be changed, and is staying dry for more than 2 – 3 hours, you can encourage his learning by:

1. Buying a potty seat if you don’t already have one
2. Allowing him to choose big boy pants with his favorite character
3. Consider giving her a positive reward (stickers, small candy or toy) for successful attempts. Rewards can really help a child overcome any resistance to toilet learning. Let your child help choose the reward so it is something she will want to earn.
4. Showing him that bowel movements from his diaper go into the toilet (You can let your child flush the toilet as part of his learning. But be careful as some children feel fearful of toilets flushing and think they have “lost” a precious part of them.)
5. Some families use the “diaper free weekend” approach.
6. Leave the rest of the learning up to your child.

If you see any resistance, immediately stop talking to your child about any aspect of toileting and wait until she is interested.

SEXUALITY

Toilet learning is also the time when children first become comfortable with their sexuality. You can help your child develop healthy attitudes.

1. Toilet training your child will often bring out your own concerns about your sexuality. Make sure you feel comfortable with your own body.
2. Use the correct words for private body parts – penis scrotum, labia, vulva. We don’t use slang words for other body parts (eyes, ears, nose), so it is best to also use correct terms for genitalia.
3. You can begin casually telling your child that boys and girls are made differently.
4. You may want to let your child know that the parts of the body that are covered by underwear can be called “private parts”. No one is allowed to touch private parts except for the child or parents.

Children, during the third year of life, are also developing their gender identity through play and imitation. Children play “dress up” and try on different roles. Have some old clothes, shoes, and hats for this play.

Your child may also prefer one parent more than another. Although this can be a difficult time for parents,

please view this as part of your child's healthy development. The parent who is the "desired" parent may feel overwhelmed and "trapped", while the "rejected" parent may take the child's behavior personally. Talk together and think of fun ways for the "rejected" parent to spend time with your child, while providing the "desired" parent with relief. Remember, all too soon the roles will be reversed.

Children can also begin masturbating. This is normal, and we encourage you to respond calmly. You may want to tell your child that while her behavior may feel good, it is private and should be done in a private space like her bedroom.

LANGUAGE

Your child will rapidly expand her vocabulary and learn complex concepts like shapes, counting, and time. She should be understood by other people about ½ of the time and should soon be putting two and three words together. Children try to talk so quickly that sometimes they will begin stuttering during this third year. Stuttering now does not mean that your child will continue to stutter later in life. If you do hear your child stuttering, please call your pediatrician for helpful hints. You can help your child's language development by:

1. Singing songs (Children love repetition and learn this way)
2. Spending time every day reading to your child
3. Allowing some time when your child can talk without interruption
4. Slowing down your speech when talking to your child (We all talk too quickly)
5. Encouraging your child's imagination
6. LIMITING television viewing and all "screen" time to less than one hour per day.

DISCIPLINE

This is a very important year for you and your child as your child continues to learn what is appropriate behavior. Your child should already know how to obey you and should be able to sit still in time out. If your child cannot / will not sit still in time out, it probably indicates that your child does not know how to obey you. Consider teaching time out again. You can:

1. Practice time out when you are not using it as a teaching tool.
2. Use positive reinforcement (stickers) when your child has sat quietly for 1 – 2 minutes
3. Use a "sand" timer so your child can visually see how long she needs to sit still
4. Start time out over each time your child tries to get up.

Time out can now be used to help your child develop her own self-control. You can tell your child to sit and think about her behavior. You can allow your child to return to her chosen activity when she is ready to control her behavior. "You can come back to play with your sister when you are ready to play without hitting." Children will often be seen struggling as they decide whether to stay seated in time out or whether they are ready to control their own behavior. When he comes out of time out, give him a hug, remind him that you love him, remind him calmly of the rule and reassure him that you know he will try hard to behave properly.

Children are developing the concept of consequences. You can encourage your child's learning by showing cause and effect. "If you go outside without a coat, you will be cold." "If you color on the walls, I will have to take away your crayons." "If you help pick up your toys, we will have time for a story."

CHORES help teach children responsibility and help them develop self-esteem as they learn to do a job well. Putting napkins on the table, putting toys away, feeding the pet – all will help your child know that she is an important member of your family and will help her "bond" to her family. Children who are bonded and connected with their family will be less likely to participate in high risk behaviors as teenagers.

SIBLINGS If you will be expecting another child this year, please ask your pediatrician for information on how to help your child adjust to the new baby.

FEARS Children normally become afraid of things that previously did not bother them – loud noises, animals, "monsters". If your child shows he is afraid, use "emotion" words to name the fear. "I see you are afraid of the dog." Then reassure your child that you are there to take care of him. Do not ridicule your child for being afraid and do not try to talk her out of her fear. Just let her know you are there to protect her.

