

# *The World of Toddlers*

~18-30 Months of Age~

## AGE APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS

1. REMEMBER—Play is never frivolous. *It is THE most effective way a toddler learns; it's essential*. It can be enhanced.
2. Toddlers can take their life experiences and extend them to their play. Watch them play house, doctor, taking care of the baby, puppy, pet, etc.
3. Hands-on experiences are the best kind of play. They learn much quicker than if they are told or "talked to". **\*\*This is also an excellent reason why it is better to not do worksheets at this age.**
4. Toddlers need to have playmates around. Even though they may not play with another person at this age, they are always paying attention to what is going on around them and what their peers are doing.
5. Toddlers have emotions similar to adult emotions but their thought processes are quite different.
6. Their emotions are close to the surface. Think of them as a light switch—one minute they might be happy and suddenly they are sad; they can go from calm to agitated in a second. Your best approach is to stay calm yourself and be patient.
7. Patience is the most important word I can think of when dealing with toddlers. This allows them the time to observe, learn, and trust themselves and their abilities.
8. Toddlers are learning how to be independent. They are learning that they have power to do things or not do things. Allow them to experience this and the consequences of their actions. **\*\*Note: this helps to explain why SHARING is often difficult. If they are establishing their own sense of self it is hard for them to share with another. This is a gradual process and improves closer to three years of age or older.**
9. Toddlers can't see things or understand things "from another person's point of view". This is the stage where they are struggling to assert themselves and can't really understand the other side of the story! They are busy establishing their autonomy.
10. Activities, projects, and play time allow us as teachers and caregivers to share valuable time together in a meaningful way. We can observe how they are learning and where we can enhance their opportunities.

11. Children will play—with us or without us. It is our role to enhance the play when it is supportive and to intervene or change the situation if it appears too difficult and exceeds their abilities.

## INDOOR GAMES

1. **DOWN THE CHUTE**—Create a ramp. You can use a tray, a board, strong cardboard, etc. and prop it up on the edge of a chair, a large building block, whatever you have on hand. Provide toy cars, trucks, balls, tubes, even square objects and let them roll these down the ramps. They love this activity and they notice how some objects go faster than others and some may not even go down at all without being pushed. Their imaginations take over and they play with the objects under the ramp as well as sending them down the chute.
2. **DUPLOS**—These are the large legos made for toddlers. Put them out in the center of the room and then have them sort these in any way you suggest—by color, shape, etc. Then count out loud with them about how many reds, blues, or greens. Mix them all up again and then ask them if they can build a “red” tower, a long green line, etc. This helps them with colors, motor skills, directionality, etc. Lots to do here so use your imagination and follow their suggestions as well. They are creative as well and we learn from them.
3. **BALANCING ACT**—You will need two pieces of string or long strips of masking tape (about 6 feet or 1.8 meters long). Create a circus tight rope on the ground with the string. Next show them how to walk on this by placing one foot in front of the other. Next have them try. (You will probably need to hold their hand the first few times until they get the idea of balancing.) An alternative is to put the two strings about 4 inches apart and ask them to walk carefully between the lines without stepping on the edges. Great fun, concentration, balance, etc.
4. **TREASURE HUNTS**—All children love treasure hunts and you can use this in so many ways and make it easier or harder depending on the age and skill of your children. Take all the stuffed animals and hide them throughout the classroom. Ask for their help in finding them and returning them to their proper place in the classroom. You can hide anything you are learning about, for example hide lots of objects of a certain color, cutouts of a letter you are learning, objects that are a certain shape and ask for their help in finding them and bringing them back to circle time. Then you can count, sort, etc.

5. **SHADOW FUN**—This is a great thing to do and I find it most effective on cloudy or rainy days when the classroom is darker than normal. Clear a large area in the room near a blank wall if possible. Place a large lamp in the middle of the room and have a child go between the lamp and the wall. They can move around and see their shadow on the wall. Play some music (I use fast and slow rhythms) and let them dance or move to the music and watch their shadows. Lots of fun and great way to use up some energy!
6. **FILLING CONTAINERS**—Provide a play station with containers of all sizes (add a toy dump truck if you have one). Provide lots of small toys, blocks, plastic letters, anything that will fit into the containers. Give them time to fill the containers then dump them out and try again. This is an activity I have found that is almost soothing for children.
7. **CLOWNING AROUND**—This is an age where they love to be silly. What better way to be silly than to pretend to be a clown. Ask them how clowns are silly and make people laugh (offer suggestions such as making funny faces, wearing bright wigs and make-up, walking funny ways, etc). Next ask them to be a clown for their classmates. This is an activity that can be done one at a time or ask the whole class to clown around all at once.
8. **WHAT IS IT?**—take a box that is large enough to hold a few different items and cut a hole in the side large enough for their hand to fit through but not so large that they can see inside. Place 4 or 5 objects that they would see or use in a day such as an orange, a cup, a flashlight, a toy. Next have them take turns putting their hand in the box and let them guess what is in the box. They should find one object and try to guess what it is. If they don't know at first ask them to describe it. This is good for sensory experience, mental imagery, verbal skills and fine motor skills.\*\* (You can do this activity several times a year using seasonal items.)

## **OUTDOOR GAMES**

1. **FOLLOW THE ROPE**—Set up a long length of rope outside on the ground. Make sure it has a few twists and turns on its path. Tell the children to start at one end of the rope and walk very carefully on the rope from beginning to end. If they fall off they can start over at the beginning or continue where they stepped off. When they get to the end, have them walk backwards. Gross motor skills are developed here as well as concentration, balance and body awareness.

2. **WATER BALLOONS**—Fill balloons with water and give them to the toddlers. Gently play catch with the water balloons. You can fill them with varying amounts of water to show how some are lighter than others. Also, draw targets on the sidewalk with chalk and have them toss the balloons at the targets. Good for eye-hand coordination and gross motor skills.
3. **PLAYGROUND PARADE**—Provide the children with musical instruments. These can be as simple as a bucket for a drum, a bottle filled with some pebbles for maracas, noise makers or horns if you have them. Show the toddlers how to march by lifting their knees high as they walk and have a musical parade around the playground. You can also do a follow the leader parade and let each child have a turn leading.
4. **PAINTING**—Give each child a bucket of water and a paint brush. Go around outside and tell them they can paint whatever they wish. You will find they love this and they use their imaginations!
5. **BUBBLES**—Make your own bubble solution with one part water and 2 parts tearless baby shampoo. This makes great bubbles and is easy on the eyes if they have a bubble pop on them. You can blow the bubbles and have them chase them or let them have turns blowing them and watching the wind blow them around.
6. **ROCK COLLECTORS**—Go for a walk and let them find their own special rocks to start a collection. Have a tub of water and some brushes available for them to wash their rocks and put them in the sun to dry. Save these for later so that they can use them in an art activity by painting them. (Be sure to put the child's initials on their rocks.)
7. **NUMBER CHALLENGE**—Depending on the age and ability of the toddler, select a number, usually 2 or 3, and have them do 2 of something such as stomp their feet 2 times, when they do that, add 2 of something else to do such as clap their hands. Each time they have to start with the first thing and keep adding activities until they forget the pattern. Lots of fun and can be done with one or several children all at once.
8. **LISTENING WALK**—Go for a walk and ask them to be as quiet as possible so that they can listen to all the sounds around them. Ask them to raise their hands when they hear something and can tell you what it is. Ask if it something that is special to the outside or if you can hear them inside also. Great for concentration and discrimination of sounds. This can be done equally well in the city or country, just the noises are different! You can write down the sounds that they name and then show

them how many things they named and how well they listened to the world around them.

9. **HELICOPTERS AND JUMP OVERS**—Two different ways to expend energy. First teach them how to be helicopters by holding their arms out to the side and spinning around and around. Give directions such as “fly low” and show them how to get low to the ground, and then say “fly high” and they have to reach up and stand tall while spinning. Jump overs are done by placing small obstacles such as an empty box, small milk carton, soft toy, etc. (nothing that would hurt if fallen on) and have them jump with both feet over the obstacle. Lots of fun and a real accomplishment for some to use both feet. Some toddlers will not be able to jump with both feet at once initially but will learn.

## **ARTS AND CRAFTS**

1. **FINGERPAINT**—A tried and true toddler activity that is messy and always loved. One creative twist is to allow them to paint with all mediums, such as applesauce, pudding, jam, etc. (Be sure to say this is a special activity and not to be done when they are at the table for a meal.) A second step with finger painting is what I call Reverse Painting. Have them paint a design on a flat surface. Next while the paint is still wet, give them a large sheet of white paper and lay it on top of the wet paint and rub. The design will appear on the white paper.
2. **ROCK COLLECTION**—Use the rocks that were found on their outside activity above. Give them paints, glue, glitter, ribbons, etc. and let them decorate their special rocks. Create an area in the classroom where these can be displayed and then they can take them home.
3. **PASTA NECKLACE**—Use rigatoni or penne pasta for this age group. Give them a length of string or ribbon long enough to go around their head and neck. Help them to thread the pasta onto the string until the string is almost to fill. (You can tape one end of the string on the table so that the pasta doesn't fall off the other end. Older children will figure out how to hold it so that this does not happen.) When they get to the end, tie the two ends together for them and let them paint and decorate their necklace.
4. **MINI POTS**—Toddlers enjoy playing with clay. Show them how to roll a piece of clay into a ball and then press their thumbs into the center to make an impression. Next they can continue to gently hollow out the sides to make their own pot. If you use clay, it will hold its shape. If you

- are using playdough, allow it to harden. This is an excellent fine motor activity.
5. **TISSUE PAPER SCULPTURE**—Have the children tear tissue paper into small pieces. Size and shape don't matter so this is perfect for this age. In a small bowl mix equal parts of glue and water. Show them how to crumple the paper into wads, and then dip these wads of colorful paper into the glue and stick it onto a piece of cardstock or cardboard. They can create their own sculpture!
  6. **PIPE CLEANERS**—Toddlers of all ages enjoy the feel and texture of these. Provide each toddler with a couple of pipe cleaners and let them twist and bend them into any design. Some may make stick people, others a flower and others just a squiggle. It doesn't matter what the design is just that they are feeling the texture and using their imaginations to create. These can then be glued to piece of paper for them to take home.
  7. **MILK CARTON CITY**—Save the small milk cartons that are provided with lunches or ask parents to save them for you. For the younger toddlers, cover them with construction paper ahead of time. Older ones may be able to help with this step. Have plenty of stickers, crayons and markers and let them decorate their house or store. Use a table top to display the houses and create a neighborhood for them. See if they can remember which house belongs to which student. Ideas for this are endless and provide lots of opportunity for play.

## TRANSITION IDEAS

Change is often difficult for all ages and toddlers can find it very stressful. The goal with these transition ideas is to make it fun and not totally unexpected. All of these can be "signals" for them that things are going to be changing and they can help.

1. **SONGS**—Have a special song that you use when it is time to put things away and start a new project or activity. Start playing this song and the children recognize the song and know they need to complete what they are doing and put things away before the song ends. Competition adds an element of fun and eases the stress.
2. **BEAT THE TIMER**—Tell them that you are going to play Beat the Timer. Set the timer for a certain number of minutes (5 is good for toddlers) and tell them they have need to put things back where they belong before the timer rings. Fun and quick transition.

3. **VERBAL NOTICES**—Explain to them in a brief way that it will be time to end the current activity soon to get ready for something else. Then you can use any of the other transition ideas after this statement to help ease the change.
4. **MAGIC MIST**—Credit goes to a parent many years ago who shared this idea with me. When it is time to end one activity and settle down for circle time or rest time, spray the room with Magic “are you listening” Mist. Use a clean spray bottle, fill with water and add a tiny drop of cinnamon flavoring in it. Spray up toward the ceiling so that the mist falls gently on the children. Tell them when the magic mist falls they need to be listening and getting ready for another activity.
5. **HATS**—Try having a variety of hats in the dress up area. The teacher has some that fit her as well. Each hat can mean a different transition such as a Chef’s Hat means snack time. When the teacher puts this on, the children know that it will soon be time to have something to eat. Use a straw hat to indicate outdoor time. The ideas are limitless. This gets them to notice their surroundings and others and that they are responsible to notice and follow directions.
6. **IMAGINATION BOUND**—This is similar to Simon Says but you indicate that you will be airplanes to fly outside. Each child will put things away and then hold their arms out to the side to “fly” outside, or “tiptoe” to the circle area. When they have a part in the transition, especially a physical component the transition is fun and engaging.

## LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

Needless to say, all of the interactions you have during the day with your toddlers involve language. They are learning how to listen, to discriminate sounds, and follow instructions.

1. **RHYMING**—Keep a rhyming game simple with your toddlers. Start with one syllable words and give them two or three words which rhyme so they get the idea. Then ask who can say another word that rhymes. (At this age, it doesn't matter if they say a real word or a made up one as long as they understand rhyming the sound.)
2. **STORY VARIATIONS** —Circle time activity that holds their attention is to say a nursery rhyme or story that they know. For example, say the words to “I’m a little teapot.” Say it correctly the first time and then say it but substitute a silly word in place of one of the real words. This is excellent for listening skills, discriminating sounds, and processing.

3. **SAY IT WITHOUT WORDS!**—Ask them if they can think of a way that we communicate without using words. To get them thinking, ask: how a baby tells someone he is hungry, how a dog lets his owner know he has to go out, how to tell someone where something is without using words. Once they get a couple of examples, ask them if they know other ways—(shrug shoulders, shake your head yes or no, smile, frown).
4. **TELEPHONES**—Use play telephones and begin a pretend conversation. Next tell your toddlers that they can have pretend talks on the telephone also. Toddlers enjoy holding these pretend conversations and it is good for language and vocabulary.
5. **I SPY**—This is an excellent game for all ages, even toddlers. Start out saying “I spy something...(red, long, in the sky, etc). Give simple one word clues at first and then give more detail as they try to guess. They have to listen, understand and then respond to the clues. Give them a turn to spy something for you and their friends.
6. **PUPPETS**—Use puppet play with your toddlers. Often, they will initiate and converse through the puppets even if they are generally shy on their own. This is a totally open-ended play idea and can be used repeatedly.