

Tips for Parenting Toddlers

- 1. Consistency.** It sounds easy, but every parent knows how difficult this can be. Children thrive on knowing what the rules are and even what the consequences are for violating those rules. The more consistent you are in implementing these, the better the behavior will be.
- 2. Help prevent problems by making sure your home is as toddler safe as possible.** Do you really want your wedding album out so that your 2-year-old can take a Sharpie to it? You see it as your precious memories, your child sees it as a cool thing to color.
- 3. Keep your expectations for your child developmentally appropriate.** If you tell your three-year-old to go clean up all of her toys that she has played with throughout the day, she is never going to be able to do this. But, if you say, "Please go put Elmo and Elmo's friends in your toy bucket", then you are giving her a chance to be successful.
- 4. Prepare your child for transitions.** Give your child a warning like "We are going to have to say bye and go home soon. Let's play one more game before we have to go." Your child still might get upset when it is time to leave, but building in this transition time decreases the odds of that occurring.
- 5. Don't just say "No!".** Take the time to teach your child the right way to do something. Instead of saying, "Don't run into the street!" Say, "We don't go in the street because a car might come and hurt us. But, we can play in the yard or on the sidewalk." Then, take your child to the yard or other safe area and engage in play.
- 6. Give your child the words he lacks.** Label your child's emotions for him. When your child yells about something, say "I can tell that you are really upset that Jake has a toy that you want."
- 7. Lead by example.** Think about your own behaviors and what you are teaching your child. If you and your spouse/partner yell at each other frequently, can you really tell your child not to yell at others?
- 8. Teach kindness and empathy.** Children love to help others, so give your child this opportunity to learn about how others feel and what we can do to help others in need. This can be as simple as saying something like, "Oh no! Emma fell down and got a boo-boo. What do you think will make her feel better?"
- 9. Don't rely on the television, iPad, or other electronic devices to parent your child.** When you are at a restaurant, your child does not need these things as a distraction. Your child needs to learn to sit in an environment like that, to have a conversation, and to absorb all that is around her. Think about all of the learning opportunities your child will miss otherwise. (Remember that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under age 2, and limiting it from that point on.)
- 10. Put down your electronic devices and focus entirely on your child.** When your child speaks to you, think about what it says to him if you are only half-listening while reading email. Bend down, make eye contact, and truly listen.
- 11. Take time to just play with your child.** For 10-15 minutes every day, get on the floor and let your child guide you in an activity. Follow your child's cues, and resist any urge to correct her, to do the activity for her, or tell her child the rules. Your child just wants to play, so let her have the chance.

- 12. Give your child specific praise.** Do not just say a generic, "Good job!" or "You're so smart!" Instead, tell him exactly what he did that you think deserves praise. Ex. "You did a great job putting together that puzzle!" "I love the way that you shared your toy with your brother!"
- 13. Let your child do things independently.** Toddlers desperately want to show you that they are "big" and can do things. There are a few ways you can let your child do this. For example, instead of just giving your child a snack, let her select from 2 choices. Another example is let your child try to figure out things on her own before jumping in. If you keep jumping in to do things for her, it just teaches her that she cannot do it and needs your help. If your child is able to do it, especially if it is a task that took her several attempts to do, then she has learned to not give up and gained confidence and resiliency.
- 14. Use planned ignoring.** If your child is doing things that are annoying but still safe (ex. holding onto your leg and yelling because you will not give him a cookie), just ignore him. Keep doing what you need to do and eventually he will get bored from not getting any attention from you and stop. Ignoring is a great way to handle temper tantrums too (again, as long as the child is in a safe situation).
- 15. Use the 1-2-3 warning approach.** "I am going to count to 3. If it is not done by 3, then you will lose your book." Once your child understands that you are going to really follow through on consequences, your child will typically respond by number 2. (The book *1-2-3 Magic* is fantastic for explaining this.)
- 16. For serious misbehaviors, use time out (see other handout for details).** When done properly, time out is extremely effective.
- 17. If a child throws a toy or some other object, you can put that object in time out.** Calmly take the object, tell your child that the toy will now be in time out for a certain amount of time, set a timer, and do not let her have the toy back until the timer goes off.
- 18. The louder the child becomes, the quieter and calmer you should become.** If you raise your voice as your child raises his voice, everything will just continue to escalate. Try whispering to get your child's attention. Your child wants to hear what you have to say, so he will often stop screaming long enough to come closer to you and listen if you whisper. That pause can be long enough for him to calm down and give you a chance to redirect him to something else.
- 19. The most important thing to remember is that you are the adult.** You need to stay calm and rational when your toddler is acting the complete opposite of this. Sometimes, this means that you need to take a time out yourself. If you think you are losing control, make sure your child is in a safe place and take a few minutes in a bathroom or other quiet place to just breathe and regain your own control.
- 20. Be strong!** If you can follow through now, you will set the tone for your child's childhood and adolescence. It is much harder to change your parenting style as your child becomes an adolescent. By taking steps now, you can create an environment that will help your child grow into a nurturing, empathetic, independent, and resilient adolescent and adult.