



Welcome Words for your 12-18 Month Old

What's Happening Here?

Your toddler is becoming her own person in a big way. This movement toward independence varies with each child, but usually occurs between 16 and 21 months. Among the changes you'll notice are:

Increased motor drive--she wants to be constantly on the go and is often too busy even to stop to eat; and a state called disequilibrium. Your child's internal systems--motor, sensory, cognitive and emotional--are all growing at once. This causes a systems overload similar to the way you feel when you've got a work deadline, houseguests coming, and your water heater breaks.

It's understandable, then, that your toddler is crankier than normal, clingy one minute and overly independent the next, and may have trouble sleeping. Expect heightened fears, tears when you leave her, and that she'll loudly protest leaving childcare, the park, or any other place she's having fun!



This is a frustrating time for parents, however, the overload your toddler experiences now is helping her prepare to talk, become more physically coordinated, and to develop fine motor skills.

Some toddlers say "no" to every request, even when they mean "yes." If your child says "no" to ice cream with a big smile, then you'll know she means "yes." And that you've hit the 18-month-old mark!

TANTRUMS!

Before you had an 18-month-old, you may have sworn your child would never throw a fit in the grocery store. When this actually happens, and odds are it will, ignore all the stares and assume those people know nothing about child development.

There are two basic kinds of tantrums: oppositional and those resulting from frustration. The oppositional tantrum reflects your child's growth into her own person. If, when it's time to leave the park or a friend's house, she insists on staying, her defiance is not intentional misbehavior but an inner drive for an inner drive for independence. Try to *give your child notice* before changing activities or leaving.

Sometimes you can *defuse the situation before your child blows up*. Sympathy may work. Try hugging and whispering in her ear as you scoop her up and on your way. It's helpful to *identify your child's feelings*, saying, "You seem angry that snack is all gone." If possible, once a tantrum begins, try ignoring her and busy yourself doing something nearby. Through trial and error, you'll learn which method works best with your child.

Tantrums stemming from frustration are a hallmark of this age. If an object is causing frustration, try *using play as a diversion*: "That silly toy won't work. Let's put it to bed." You may find that *sticking to a routine*, and *avoiding stresses* (like grocery shopping together), works best for both of you.

Milestones

From 12 to 18 Months

As you move toward a new sense of independence, you . . .

- Can't understand the difference between "yours" and "mine." You're likely to point to everything saying, "mine."
- Can respond to more words than you can say, which causes frustration.
- May greet other children with a push or poke. You need help learning to be social.
- May want to sit on the potty, but this is not the only sign of readiness for toilet training, which comes later.
- Have a unique personality that is still developing. I accept you for who you are now, and know that there's no "right" or "wrong" temperament.

At 18 Months, I Like To:

- Climb on anything, even pillows and cushions.
- Move to music--marching, hopping, jumping, dancing.
- Pull or push a stroller, wagon, or small shopping cart.
- Read picture books from home or the library, and have stories read to me.
- Pretend I'm cooking, raking leaves, washing dishes or shopping.

Please give me:

- Boxes and blocks (recycle milk cartons and cereal boxes).
- Spoons, clothespins and other safe items to put in containers.
- Play-Doh, old magazines or catalogs to tear, a sand box with containers and shovel, and (closely supervised) water play.
- A rainy-day indoor obstacle course of cushions and pillows.
- Lots of smiles, hugs, kisses and tickles.

What About Biting?

Biting upsets parents and children alike, and it's a common problem among 12- to 18-month-olds. Why does a toddler, typically loving and gentle, suddenly bite a playmate?

The reason can be as simple as curiosity. It's normal for babies to put everything in their mouths, and biting may be another kind of tactile exploration.

Biting may also be linked to frustration with language, since 18-month-olds can't use words as well as they'd like. Often, biting happens when a child is tired, hungry, teething or over-stimulated, and/or when the toddler simply desires to get another child's attention.

Here are some tips that may help prevent biting:

- Give immediate attention and sympathy to the child who's been bitten. Describe the child's feelings. "Look, your friend is crying. That really hurt."
- Let the biter know that hurting is not OK, but then quickly distract her with something that is acceptable to bite, perhaps a slice of apple.
- Model more acceptable ways to get attention from playmates, such as giving high fives. This allows touching without getting too close.



Unless the skin is broken, first aid can be limited to washing the area and applying an ice pack. If the skin is broken, wash carefully with antiseptic soap and warm water and contact the child's physician for further instructions.

Remember that most children who bite outgrow this behavior as their language skills advance. In the meantime, if your child has a tendency to bite (or pinch), try to stay close by her in times of excitement and stress so you will be near enough to prevent biting before it happens.

Suggested Reading

Love and Logic: Magic for Early Childhood
by Jim Fay & Charles Fay, Ph.D.

Your Child at Play: One to Two Years
by Marilyn Segal, Ph.D. & Don Adcock, Ph.D.

What to Expect: The Toddler Years
by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff
& Sandee Hathaway, B.S.N.

Tips for Encouraging Good Behavior

Tighten up routines. During this time of systems overload, following the same routines--in the morning and getting ready to leave the house, at meals and bedtime--will help your child feel secure.

Drain motor drive. Lots of physical activities will regulate mood and leave less energy for tantrums. Rather than sit-down meals, offer nutritious snacks.

Scoop up. Just saying "no" to a toddler isn't enough; you'll have to use your body to get her attention. If your child's playing near the stove, scoop her up, saying, "no, that's dangerous." Then find a distraction immediately: "Look, there's a robin in the window in the kitchen." Without a good distraction, most likely your toddler will be right back next to the stove.

Distraction is okay. *At this age*, your child can't control her impulses. By not allowing the forbidden behavior, you're giving your toddler the message she needs. A two-minute visit to the front steps, or a mid-day bath for water play, can change a bad mood into a better one.

Use humor and fantasy. If your toddler doesn't want to stop playing to take a bath, tell her, "I'm the train and you're the caboose" and chug into the bathroom together.

State her feelings for her: "You're so sad to leave the park. Pick one last thing to play on, then we'll say goodbye." The key is that you must stay close by and follow through.

Offer focused attention. Some people call this sports casting: You watch your child and tell her what you see. "I see Katie climb that step. Oh, she's got one foot up on the stair, now the other. Watch out, here she comes, climbing up the steps." This may feel awkward at first, but children love to know you really see what they're doing. Giving focused attention also tells your child, "Who you are right now, at this moment, is fine with me." It's a great self-esteem builder and just a few minutes a day makes a difference.

Toy time-out. If a toy or other object is the source of frustration, you can time it out. "Let's put this old puzzle in time-out for a few minutes." Out of sight will be out of mind.

Hugs and kisses. Remember, in just six months your child will be 2, which is generally a smoother age. In the meantime, try to offset the rough spots with hugs, kisses, laughter and a quick game of chase.