



# Welcome Words for your 2 to 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> year Old

## Your Contradictory Child

Around their second birthday, most toddlers seem calmer and easier to parent. But in just a few months, this calmness typically breaks up. By 2 1/2, children often find the world a big and overwhelming place, leaving them unsure of themselves and their hard-won efforts at independence. Before, your toddler's opposition seemed to be away from you. Now she contradicts herself: she wants to wear a bathing suit and a sweater, to go to the park and watch Sesame Street--all at the same time. You will probably notice:

- Sameness is very important. She likes routines for eating, getting dressed, and going to bed to be the same every day because this helps her feel more secure.
- She has difficulty making choices. She'll want both milk and juice, rather than picking just one.
- In an effort to control her world, she may become very bossy.
- She's easily frustrated and will suck her thumb, cling to a toy, throw a tantrum, or scream to release tension.
- She can be clingy one minute and independent the next. She'll probably want whatever, or whoever, is not available.
- She is still unable to share & needs supervised, brief visits with other children.

In spite of all this, 2 1/2-year-olds can be lots of fun. Their developing sense of humor invites silly wordplay and gentle teasing. You may be able to use this to turn disappointment or frustration into lighthearted fantasy. For instance, "You'd like another cookie and so would I. I wish we had more cookies. I wish we had a mountain of cookies!"

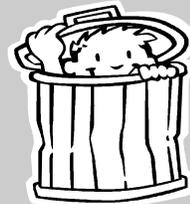


Your child's turbulence now is paving the way for the much calmer 3-year-old she'll become. Keep in mind that things will be getting easier for both of you soon.

## At 2 1/2,

I am -

- developing a sense of humor.
- able to undress and enjoy taking my clothes off.
- imitate others, especially caring for my dolls or stuffed toys.
- may begin to play with others, especially if used to group situations.
- am easily frustrated and often have temper tantrums.
- cling to one item for security. am shy with strangers, especially adults.
- don't accept new places well.
- am often bossy, tense, explosive.
- demand sameness and set up rituals for myself.



## Give me

- time to be free of clothes, maybe just before bath time.
- opportunities to "do it myself" whenever feasible.
- lots of time to run and climb at the park or playground.
- a large cardboard box for play.
- puzzles with big pieces (check these out at the library).
- rubber balls.
- paints and fingerpaint; large brushes for painting outside with water.
- stories and the chance to tell you a story.
- sidewalk chalk.
- bubbles to blow and chase

## Saying Goodbye to Diapers!

Sara, at 28 months, has said good-bye to diapers. Soon after her second birthday, she eagerly sat on a potty chair. She began telling her parents when she needed to get to the bathroom, and with hardly an accident, moved to training pants. In a few months, she also stayed dry through the night. Chad, her twin brother, though he also expressed interest in using the potty chair at around 2 years, quickly lost interest. He is still in diapers and shows no desire to give them up.

How can twins be so different?

Easy, say experts, who note that both responses are within the normal developmental range for toddlers. Many children, in fact, won't be out of diapers until they are 3 or older, while others, like Sara, are reliably using the toilet for both bladder and bowel movements before 2 1/2. Like Chad, many boys are slower to develop control than girls, particularly for night dryness. Before beginning the toilet learning process with your child, look for these signs of readiness:

- ◆ Your toddler wants her diaper changed so she'll be dry and clean;
- ◆ Recognizes when she is having, or is about to have, a BM or needs to urinate and can tell you; and
- ◆ Wants to imitate adult behavior and be grown up.

If your child seems ready:

- Introduce a potty chair or booster seat.
- Ask her to let you know when she needs to get to the potty.
- Make sure her clothing is easy to manage; avoid coveralls.
- Tell her that you expect her to put her urine and BM in the toilet or potty.
- Children's books, such as *Once Upon a Potty*, may be helpful.

Be casual about accidents and praise success, but don't go overboard. You don't want this to become a power struggle. And remember that some children's style is to practice and learn by trial and error; others prefer to wait until they are able to succeed quickly.

If early progress seems to be followed by resistance, it's okay to stop and continue using diapers. This can be a slow and frustrating process if either you or your child feels pressured. When your child can tell you, "I want to pee in the potty," then you'll know she's ready.



## TAMING TANTRUMS

What reduces your child to that state of meltdown commonly referred to as a tantrum? Fatigue, hunger, change of environment, frustration or opposition? Is a tantrum predictable at a certain time of day? In a particular place or situation?



Often parents can identify triggers for tantrums and then figure out ways to avoid these stresses. One mother says she never leaves home without a snack. Some parents trade off grocery shopping so their toddler doesn't go along; another family gives their 2 1/2-year-old the job of collecting grocery store coupons. If you can predict difficult times and places, you and your toddler will find it easier to cope.

But you can't prevent every tantrum. Once a tantrum begins, try to figure out what helps calm your toddler. Some respond to being scooped up and hugged, and can then be diverted. For others, being held only makes the tantrum worse. In this case, you may have to remove your child from the scene, or, if it's possible and safe, remove yourself.

Once the tantrum has passed, reward positive behavior. Use sports-caster language to describe what she's doing, "Annie, I see that you're building a high tower with the blocks," and perhaps give her a spontaneous hug.

Don't forget that children this age love order and predictability. If you haven't established daily routines, or if you've let bedtime (or other) routines slip, use these as a first line of defense.

Then, when the inevitable tantrum occurs in a public place, ignore the stares. Anyone who has had a 2 1/2 year old knows that tantrums cannot be helped.

## Moving to a Big Bed

If your child's move to a big bed has created night wandering, here are some tips that may help:

- Add a gate across the open doorway. If your child climbs over, add a second gate above the first. (The gate should meet all safety standards and be easily removable should you need to get to her.) You can negotiate removing these gates: "If you stay in your bed, we'll keep the gate down."
- Be sure there's a night light in the hall, and, in case she gets out of her room, a gate across any stairs. A hook-and-eye lock high on doors into other rooms, such as to the kitchen, will keep her safe.
- If she wakes and is frightened by a bad dream, go to her. If she does come into your room, return her to her bed with little comment and tuck her back in.