

FROM TWO TO THREE YEARS TODDLERS BECOMING INDEPENDANT

Keeping two year olds healthy

During the year between two and three children usually become toilet trained

During this period children will usually indicate that they are ready to be toilet trained but it is not a race and as with any area of development children will become ready in their own time. Easy to remove clothing such as elasticated trousers will make things a lot easier for your child. More guidance can be found at <http://www.nct.org.uk/parenting/potty-training>

Continue to introduce your child to a healthy and more varied diet

This is the time when your child should be experiencing a healthy and more varied diet and acquiring good eating habits which will affect lifelong health. Sugar and salt should be kept to healthy limits and let your toddler experience a wide range of fresh vegetables and fruit. It is a good idea to encourage your toddler to drink water instead of unhealthy sugary or fizzy drinks. They will see parents as role models with regards to eating and sitting at a table and managing a knife and fork. Enjoying a healthy family meal will be a social event as well as a learning experience for your toddler.

From the age of two toddlers can receive the nasal spray flu vaccine

From the age of two onwards most toddlers can receive the flu vaccine as a nasal spray. In some cases an injection has to be administered. Contracting flu can present dangers to both younger and older people, especially those with underlying health problems and it is advisable to be protected against it.

Children may still have 'tantrums' but these will probably lessen during this year

Children may well still have 'tantrums' at this stage but they are likely to die out during this period. They desperately want to become independent and feel frustrated in their abilities and in not being able to convey their feelings. Firm and consistent boundaries and routines have to be laid down but patience and love must underpin these and be conveyed to the toddler. A young child who is poorly or tired may need you to be more flexible. Although they have grown up a lot over the last two years, they are still very young and trying to make sense of the world. They are still testing boundaries and wanting to know that you are there to keep them safe. Try to be patient and simply accept that your child is upset. As they calm down try to get them interested in something – a favourite book or toy.

Children will become increasingly active at this stage and adults need to support children's physical development

Children will become increasingly active and want to climb and master gross motor skills, which is necessary before fine manipulative skills can be perfected. Research is increasingly telling us

that brain development and health are closely linked to physical development. Like healthy eating, keeping the body healthy is a habit which will be modelled and learned within the family. Make opportunities and time for your toddler to be active, to run and jump and play with a ball. Find safe things for them to climb, including climbing up and down stairs but always under supervision. At this age regular walks together can be a part of each day, even if just to the end of the road or a corner shop.

Keeping two year olds safe

Children will not be able to assess danger at this stage

Although children may seem very grown up between two and three they are still very young and are still not always able to assess dangers even though these might have been talked about. Children still depend on us to keep them safe and look out for them in all circumstances. Gates have to be kept closed and external boundaries kept secure. Adults still need to try and look at all safety aspects with regards to the child. At this stage children may want to start to sleep in a bed instead of a cot and some parents may choose to make this a mattress on the floor as opposed to a bed which the child may roll off. Children should be securely fastened into cars and hands firmly held as they walk along a street. They have to be supervised at all times but this gives children a chance to have valuable companionable time with an adult which they might not have under other circumstances.

Make sure your child understands boundaries.

Children will not be able to fully comprehend and hold in mind discussions around safety issues and may well embark on a dangerous activity even though they have been warned not to. It is a good idea that children begin to understand words such as NO, STOP and BE CAREFUL. In this way if a child is running towards something dangerous or grasping for something harmful adult intervention can support young children to begin to regulate their own behaviour.

It is a good idea to teach your child his full name

It is also a good idea to start to teach your child their full name and maybe their address as this year progresses so that in case of emergencies, such as being lost, these details can be given to the person helping them.

Teach your child skills which will help them keep safe

Teaching your child to go up and down stairs safely, to climb onto settees, to use a knife and fork safely and how to handle a sharp instrument will serve them better than forbidding activities which might well take place once your back is turned. It is better to help them to do and use things safely. This gives the child a positive message, that you see them as capable of doing things sensibly and safely.

Allow your child to take safe risks

Creating an ethos of possibilities can be achieved by allowing your child to take safe risks.

Make deliberate opportunities for your child to experience safe risks. Visit adventure playgrounds and sand pits, search out fallen trees that are safe to climb, run through long grass and risk the safe fall, go to the swimming baths, enjoy a helter skelter ride. Only if your child can estimate their capabilities appropriately will they be able to keep themselves safe. Only if they know that they hurt when they fall will they try to avoid falling. Wrapping children up in cotton wool will ultimately put them at more risk as they will have no understanding of their limits.

Helping two year olds learn

Continue to talk and offer explanations to your child.

To talk is to teach and talking to your child is of the utmost importance throughout childhood and beyond. It helps set up brain networks but also equips your child with the skills and knowledge that are essential for all later learning. The more words that your child knows, the larger the size of a child's vocabulary, is a strong indicator of probable later educational achievement. Continually try to introduce new words to your child and talk about a wide range of topics. Include colour, size, number and shape. Explain what you are doing as you go about your chores, why you are doing things and what exactly you are doing. Gradually introduce talk about feelings and explain why you feel certain ways. If your child attends nursery always ask what they have done that day and on the way to nursery what they intend to do; if they want to play inside or outside; who will they play with etc. etc Do not worry if your child offers limited responses to your attempted conversations and remember to wait for replies as they have to absorb and digest what is being said to them before deciding on their response. Some children use a few isolated words but then suddenly start to talk in sentences. Children with communication difficulties still need to have the language input even though they may communicate back to you in their own way. Signing at this age is often an important strategy for children with communication difficulties but it can also be useful for all children. For more information about signing click here

<http://www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect/guide/communication/Pages/Signlanguage.aspx>

Play music, sing songs and recite rhymes to your child

Introduce your child to all kinds of music and help them to make music using household items such as pans and spatulas. This improves awareness of different sounds as well as allowing your child to experience their own musicality. Sing songs and recite rhymes, eventually together, and have a collection of favourites that become old friends. Children love the familiar as well as the new and exciting.

Read books, ask questions about the pictures, dramatise stories and allow your child to draw and paint

Cuddle up and share those special book reading sessions together and reread your child's favourites again and again. Allow stories to become old friends. Talk about the pictures, speculate and ask open ended questions such as "What do you think....?" Have a go at acting out the story together and maybe adding fresh bits onto it. A love of books and stories is an essential

introduction to reading. Loving stories gives a sense of purpose to reading for the young child. If they grow to truly love stories they will want to read. For what other purpose might a young child want to read? Drawing and painting both allow your child to begin to express themselves in ways other than spoken language but also provide much needed opportunities to develop eye-hand co-ordination which is very important for learning to form letter shapes and beginning to write for real in the future.

Allow your child to become independent and try to do things for themselves

Your child will want to become more and more independent and do things unaided. Adults are almost always in a rush and find it quicker just to do things for the child rather than wait. Every time we do this we are removing opportunities for our children to learn and develop both their skills and knowledge. We want to paint a picture of the world where many things are possible, not one where nothing is allowed. It is important to spend that extra minute and allow your child to button their own coat, put on their own sock, find their own shoe and only to help if it is requested. The extra minutes spent waiting will benefit your child enormously.

Allow time and space for learning through play and everyday family activities

All children should be given time and space for play as only through play can children come to understand their world. At this stage children will mostly enjoy playing alone often putting into words their thoughts and actions and using everyday life as a theme; maybe talking on the telephone, feeding the baby, making a cup of tea.. In daily life the most ordinary events can be learning adventures; visiting relatives, hanging out the washing, sharing a family meal, walking to the corner shop or picking siblings up from school. Young children are naturally inquisitive about the world in which they live including people, places and events – talking to children about these things, including them in these experiences will provide valuable opportunities for them to gain both an insight and understanding of this very complex world they are growing up in.

Children with disabilities may have a wider range of developmental milestones and so their needs may differ - always consult with your Doctor, Health Visitor, Nursery or Children's Centre who will be able to provide more information on supporting individual children's development.

Enjoy being with your child being at this age, as that is the best way to prepare them for the next stage of their learning and development!