

The Temperamental, Teary, “Trying” Twos

by Marilyn Krock

Although often referred to as the “terrible twos,” this period of a child’s development is one of the most exciting and rewarding, if you keep a sense of humor!

”Trying twos” is more appropriate because young children between their second and third birthday are expending a lot of energy “trying out” their world. Testing limits, exploring possibilities, and developing a unique personality are all part of God’s plan for growth and development. At times, all this excitement can become “trying” for parents as they struggle to keep pace. Hang in there! Take a moment for prayer. God understands the stress!

Now toddlers’ brains are in full gear. They seem to have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. “What’s that?” and “Why?” become their favorite expressions. Keep answers as simple and direct as possible. Have them repeat the word back to you for reinforcement. Don’t criticize pronunciation at this age because they have not yet mastered all language sounds. Correcting pronunciation constantly can lead to hesitancy in speaking, regression to baby talk, or perhaps stuttering.

As vocabulary increases, toddlers feel more in control of their lives. Gradually, they can be taught words for emotions, then they can express verbally what they are feeling. Being able to verbalize anger, frustration, or jealousy cuts down on tantrums. Lots of patience is required by parents and caregivers to accomplish this growth step.

During this time toilet training usually becomes appropriate. Once children are capable of understanding what is expected of them, training can be accomplished more easily. Reassure them that eating and eliminating are natural processes. God created all living things to function this way. There is nothing “bad” or “dirty” about going to the bathroom. When parents make an issue of toilet training, it becomes a power struggle.

Play is children’s work; they gain muscle control from active, outdoor activities, such as running, climbing, and playing ball. During this year children move from parallel play to cooperative play. Role playing fascinates them as they recreate home situations using dolls or stuffed animals for “children.” Listen and learn!

Excessive viewing of television hampers proper development of young children. Because of its passive effect, it drains learning energy, diminishes interpersonal communication, and overstimulates their minds and senses. Parents need to monitor the amount and quality of programs viewed. Scientific evidence indicates that children watching violent shows, even cartoons, exhibit significantly greater aggressive behavior.

At this time in a toddler’s life, a sibling may enter the scene! Parents need to be aware that jealousy is natural. Reactions vary depending on the age and temperament of the child; the degree to which the new baby is demanding of attention; and, the caring time parents dedicate to helping adjustment occur. Capitalize on a natural phase that occurs during this period of development when young children want to display their skills by helping. Find simple, but meaningful, tasks that can be successfully accomplished. Point out how nice it is that the child is “big” enough to help. Encourage their interest in being a good “big” brother or sister.

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