



12-15 Months

Although there were times during your baby's first year when the days (and nights) seemed endless - 3 a.m. feedings, late afternoon cranky sessions, that first tooth breaking through - right now things probably feel a little calmer in some ways, and more demanding in others. This seems to be true for all stages of development; while some things get easier, there are always new challenges. Your child has made the transformation from the tiny stranger who came home with you from the hospital to a self-confident, opinionated person who takes up more space than any two adults combined. As you set about celebrating her first birthday, you find yourself wondering how it all happened so fast. Don't be surprised by a rush of emotions. You have probably just been through the most emotional and intense year of your adult life!

One-year-olds have a remarkable sense of independence that comes hand-in-hand with their new ability to do things for themselves. But as much as they enjoy their independence, they also take great pleasure in running back into your arms. They love to be cuddled and carried and babied... as long as they're the ones who decide when to be a "big girl" and when to be "a baby." While this can drive parents crazy ("Is she a baby or a teenager?") what your child needs to know is that whatever she chooses to be in any given moment, you'll be there for her. In fact, if you respond to her need to be "babied," she'll eventually choose the "big girl" role over the baby

For your toddler, taking a walk is a thrilling adventure, filled with endless opportunities for making new discoveries with the person he loves the most in the world!

If your toddler could talk:

What a day! So much to see and smell, hear and do. The wind feels so cool on my face and I love the smell of freshly cut grass. I hear a dog barking. It sounds just like mine. Maybe if I wiggle around a lot and make some unhappy noises you'll unstrap me and let me push the stroller. When you talk with me about what we see and hear, I begin to learn new words like "car" and "bird." I learn about making friends when we visit neighbors. When you ask me questions like "How do you think that bird got into that tree?" you teach me to be a good thinker. You keep me safe as I try new things like climbing the steps of the library as you follow close behind. I love it when you slow down and let me be the leader. When we explore together, you open the world to me and I feel I can do anything!

What your toddler is learning:

Following your child's lead and joining him as he explores the world tells him his interests and ideas are important. You're building his self-esteem and encouraging his curiosity and creativity. His language and intellectual development blossom when you describe new things and relate them to familiar things. ("That dog reminds me of Buddy.") Each time you invite your child to step out of his stroller and walk or climb, you are boosting his confidence in the use of his body. And when you share in the delight of his discoveries - finding a shiny pebble or a colorful leaf - you are nurturing his desire to become a lifelong learner.

What you can do:

- Share your child's wonder when he makes new discoveries. The simplest objects offer important lessons. Point out rocks that are big and small; houses that are red, yellow, blue; and trees that are short and tall. Children pick up these concepts best when they learn about them through their everyday experiences.
- Encourage him to use his body to explore - to push his stroller, bend down to examine objects, climb stairs. This gives him confidence that he can use his body to get what or where he wants.

When you read with your child, you are not only helping her develop good language skills, you are also building a strong, close relationship with her as you encourage her lifelong love of reading.

If your toddler could talk:

One of my favorite times with you is when we read books together. It feels so cozy and warm to snuggle up with you. I like it best when you show me a few books and then let me pick which one I want. You may wonder why I pick the same book day after day. But it makes me feel so smart when I know what the book is about and can recognize the pictures. I love seeing pictures of kids doing things I do, or pictures of things I see in my world - like the cat who lives next door. Don't worry if I keep turning back to the same page, or if I just flip quickly through the book in seconds flat! There are so many ways to enjoy books. The point is, I'm having fun; and when I'm having fun, I'm learning.

What your toddler is learning:

Children come to love reading, not just because they find books interesting, but because it is a joyful, shared experience with you. They make the connection between reading and being close to you, and that connection makes them want to read more. The more they read, the more likely they are to pick up language and communication skills, as well as an understanding of the world around them. There is no "right" way to read with your baby. The only criteria is to make sure she is engaged and having fun. She may want to read the same books over and over again; or she may whiz through a book with lightning speed. Let her be in control of selecting what to read and turning the pages and she'll have a wonderful time.

What you can do:

- Make time for reading everyday.
- Don't feel you have to read every word in the book. Some of the best books for young children are those with only pictures and no words. You can make up the story. And as your child grows and her imagination develops, she can make up her own story.
- Go to your local library and let her explore. See what books she seems to like. Take her to story time for kids her age. As her interest in being with other children grows, she'll love this group activity.

Reading your baby's cues

	What to expect	What you can do
<i>I'm on the Move</i>	Your toddler will become increasingly mobile--walking and climbing up stairs on all fours. Remember, just because he can get up those stairs doesn't mean he can get down! That's when he'll need some help!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create lots of safe places in your home where your child can explore without any fear of danger. Left to his own devices, in a safe environment, your baby will do all kinds of exciting things: crawl under tables, cruise around a coffee table, stand on his own, practice balancing and even take his very first solo steps.
<i>Listen to me</i>	Your toddler's communication skills will grow by leaps and bounds. She'll use her gestures, as well as her voice, to show you what she wants. She'll point to the refrigerator door when she's hungry, and drag you to her toy shelf to point to what she wants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read, read and read some more • Label her feelings for her, "You're mad I took the stick away!" • Narrate what's happening. "We're rolling the ball. You have the ball . . . now I have the ball." • When she says part of a word, repeat the "true" word for her. When she says, "juju," you say, "You want juice."
<i>I can make it work</i>	Your toddler will develop a better understanding of how things work. As he learns about the objects around him, like toothbrushes and telephones, he'll want to use them all by himself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer toys that represent objects in his world, such as play food, to help him practice being a "big person." • Give your child the opportunity to make things happen. Blow bubbles outdoors that he can chase, poke and pop. Provide simple musical instruments such as a tambourine or maraca.
<i>I can do it</i>	Your toddler will want to participate more in daily routines. This kind of involvement will enhance her development on all fronts: motor, intellectual, social and emotional. Plus, she'll delight in connecting with you around "real work."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include your child in everyday activities. She will feel proud and competent when she helps you do simple chores such as putting the napkins on the table. • Let her help as you dress her. She can get her arms into sleeves and feet into shoes, and she'll feel so proud of her accomplishments. • Give her a spoon and let her try to feed herself soft foods like yogurt or applesauce.
<i>That's what friends are for</i>	Your toddler will be eager to watch and play with peers. He learns so many important skills through imitation, and he learns about how relationships work through interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for him to play with other children. Research shows that toddlers are fascinated by and learn from their peers. • Don't expect or pressure your toddler to share -- he's not ready yet. You can start to introduce the idea of "turn taking" by saying, "Now it is Sara's turn . . . Now it's Bob's turn." As you pass a toy back and forth. But if it doesn't fly, don't push it!

<i>Try and stop me!</i>	Your baby's increasing drive to explore will require guidance from you about what she can and can't do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distract and divert! While toddlers do understand "No! Don't touch that!" and may stop themselves when they hear you say it, they do not yet have the impulse control to stop themselves from doing it again. It's very easy to fall into a trap of saying "No" all day long. So, rather than say "No," try diverting your child's attention with a substitute toy or activity, something to which you can say, "Yes!"
<i>Routines rule</i>	There are certain things your toddler does every day... eat, sleep, wake up, get dressed. Establish routines around these activities, because toddlers find comfort in structure and predictability; plus, it will help avoid power struggles in the years ahead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a regular bedtime routine: bath, book, song and bed . . . or whatever works for you. The specifics aren't nearly as important as the fact that your toddler will be able to predict what's going to happen when, and not have to worry about surprises. • Mealtime is another good place for routine. "Before you leave the high chair, we have to wipe your hands!"
<i>Imagine that!</i>	When your toddler imitates your actions - by sweeping the floor, stirring a play pot, etc. - she's actually taking her first steps into the world of imagination and ideas. Learning to pretend lays the foundation for advanced thinking skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage make-believe by helping to set the stage and joining her play. "Are you making dinner? Can I try some?" • Provide lots of good props. A block can become a car; a chair can become a cave. Let her know how much you appreciate her imagination.

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