

child development 1-2 years



The time between one and two is one of rapid change. Your baby is on the move and discovering the world. Parenting becomes demanding in a different way because you have to think about safety and setting limits as well as caring for your baby. Some parents miss their tiny baby and others are pleased that their baby has a little more independence.

Social and emotional development

It is in the course of this year that your toddler understands that he is a completely separate person from you. This not only causes him to worry about the possibility of you leaving him but also causes the much repeated words 'me' and 'mine'. The whole notion of owning something needs first to have a self to own it. Having his 'own' way or declaring an object 'mine' is a way of coming to grips with this exciting and rather frightening new idea. It is hard to understand what something is unless you also know what it is not, so your toddler may also be into opposites - probably mostly the opposite of whatever you are suggesting at the time!

Although they can often understand many words, children in their second year cannot grasp abstract concepts - they are strictly concrete thinkers. They often do not respond to spoken commands and need to be distracted, moved away or picked up very often - even though they seem to understand 'no' they are unable yet to control their impulses enough to obey. Parenting an 18 month old is physically very demanding.

- Your child will be curious and energetic but he depends on an adult's presence for reassurance and needs a lot of adult attention.
- Your child is very attached to and dependent on parents and likely to be afraid of separation because he does not yet fully understand that you will come back.
- He enjoys playing with an adult and likes repetitive games.

- He shows interest in other children but usually plays alone. He has no idea of sharing at this age and should not be expected to share.
- Your child will imitate actions and games of others, e.g. talking on a toy telephone.
- He may be more cooperative in dressing because of a desire to imitate adults and 'do it myself'.
- Your child may want to 'get it right' and experience unbearable frustration if he can't achieve mastery over a task.
- His ability to feed himself is slowly improving and he is likely to be choosy about what he eats.

Developing understanding

In the second year children still have no ability to see the world in perspective. They are learning about individual objects from ground level. Concepts of time and distance – 'too fast, too slow, too far' – are all beyond their grasp, often to the frustration of parents for whom these concepts are real.

They are, however, working hard on sorting the objects they see into understandable groups. At first these groups may be quite loose. For example, having seen and remembered a duck, they are likely to say 'duck' when they first see a chicken because they both have feathers and wings. It's interesting to watch the powers of observation they bring to this task of organising the objects, characters and animals they come across in their world.

- Your child's ability to remember is improving and may show at times in being able to think before she acts, e.g. remembering something is hot.
- Between 18 months and two years of age her ability to recognise similarities and differences in things increases and she will be interested in sorting things into groups, e.g. cars, blocks, animals.
- Your child also begins to work out what things belong together, e.g. picking out Daddy's shoes, putting the crayons with the paper.

- Your child will begin to try matching and fitting and will be able to complete some simple puzzles, e.g. shapes or familiar animals.
- She will remember and copy past events.
- She will enjoy simple make-believe play, e.g. talking on the telephone.
- Your child has very little understanding of time and can't understand what tomorrow means. She doesn't grasp abstract words such as pretty, empty, heavy, and she cannot talk about things that she cannot see, pick up or touch.
- She has no real understanding of size and space and may be frightened of falling down the toilet or a plughole in the bath.

Physical skills

Your child's rapidly increasing movement in this year can mean a major reorganisation of the house. They go from crawling or teetering within a limited space to walking confidently and exploring widely, pulling open every handle and twiddling every knob they can see. For safety reasons, it may be helpful to secure or remove heavy or breakable items, leaving interesting unbreakables in accessible places. Try to watch your use of language, particularly the use of negative words like "no" and "don't", as it will have a powerful effect on your toddler's view of herself and the world. You don't want to paint a picture of a world where nothing is allowed but rather a positive picture where many things are possible.

So, in guiding behaviour, try to suggest alternatives and explain dangers as simply as you can.

- By 15 months your child is able to walk alone with feet wide apart and arms held high to maintain balance.
- By two years of age your child will probably be able to run, without bumping into things and stop when necessary.
- At 15 months he gets to his feet using his hands to push up with and by two years can get up without using his hands.

- By two years most children can go down stairs while holding on but will put two feet on each step before moving to the next one.
- One year olds can push themselves along 'scooting along' on a four-wheeled riding toy.
- By two your child will be interested in and capable of turning knobs and pushing buttons.

Testing 'how far they can go' is a feature of your toddler's physical life as well as his social life. Try to let him explore freely and safely but don't let him run too far.

Language development

Language in the second year is a mirror of children's development in other ways. They quickly start to name more of the objects and their uses that they see in the world, although they will often want you to express what is in their head and too hard for them to say, like 'I want the green cup for my water'. While the number of words they know increases hugely in the course of the year, they often get very frustrated because they can't say as much as they want to - or because you don't understand what they are saying. Talk to them a lot and repeat what they have said in your replies to them, describing things you see together in simple terms, e.g. 'Yes, look at the big bus!'

- Your child's speech increases from an average of 5-20 words at 18 months to as many as 150-300 words by two years. Their understanding of words is even greater.
- By two years your child can tell you most of what she wants with words, e.g. 'outside', 'milk', 'biscuit', even though many words will not always be pronounced correctly.
- By two years sentences become longer and more accurate e.g. from 'more' to 'want more' and then 'I want more'.
- Your child's language understanding is also improving so she can remember two things at a time, e.g. 'Get the ball and bring it to Daddy'.

- Besides words to say what they want, children at this age have begun to learn some words to say how they feel, e.g. feelings of happiness 'goo' or hurting themselves 'ow', 'sore' or a word for wanting a band-aid.
- By two years your child will have enough language skills to be able to tell people what she wants them to do, e.g. 'no' or 'go away'.
- She may stammer or hesitate over particular words or when excited.

What you can do

- Your child will love to turn knobs and push buttons as this helps him to learn to use his muscles and also to feel that he can manage new things. Protect the TV, etc. and give him his own toys with knobs and buttons to press.
- Your child will be interested in playing with simple puzzles. (You may choose to borrow some from a toy library rather than buy them because children often lose interest once they can do the puzzle.)
- Your child will enjoy toys that link together, such as trains with carriages and stacking toys, hammer and peg sets, and filling and emptying containers.
- Your child will love to look at pictures, particularly if you name familiar objects and animals to him and allow him to turn the pages sometimes.
- Favourite conversations involve talking about what your child is looking at, doing or feeling. Your child learns more words when you chat this way, rather than when you ask questions. Try to avoid questions that you already know the answer to. Instead of asking 'what's that?' you might say 'oh, it's a yummy apple'.
- Play games where the child has lots of opportunities to say 'no', e.g. 'Is Daddy under the bed?'

- Provide toys, e.g. fruit, animals, cars, so your child can learn about difference and sameness.
- Young children love to copy others and to dress up, and play with toys that allow them to copy household activity, e.g. telephone, dolls, washing up.
- Allow your child to play by himself at times without interference so that he learns to entertain himself. He will ask for help if he wants it.

What to watch out for

You should have your child checked by a health professional where:

- your child is tripping over her feet a lot and this is not improving
- your child cannot walk
- she cannot hold a spoon and get most of the food to her mouth
- she cannot pick up small objects
- your child cannot build a tower of three to four bricks
- she is only using up to 20 single words consistently
- she does not understand simple directions (this does not mean she will always do as you tell her)
- she often runs very far away (out of sight) or climbs extremely high without hesitation.

Toileting

Many parents will want to start 'toilet training' their child towards the end of the second year as their child will usually be showing awareness of their bowel movements. Most children will 'train' themselves when they are ready, with some simple encouragement from their parents, and this can happen any time between about two years and three and a half years, but it usually does not happen before children are two years old.

As two year olds are keen to be able to boss themselves and 'get it right' they can get very worried and frightened about not managing their own toileting properly. If you find tensions arising around toileting issues seek further support from a health professional.

Summary

Social and emotional development

By 18 months children are usually:

- exploring the environment around them, touching, pulling whatever they can see and reach (make sure that toddlers are safe)
- enjoying physical contact (cuddles, tickles)
- emotionally changeable, quick mood changes from happy to sad to angry
- likely to be afraid of strangers
- showing a strong attachment to parents
- showing distress when left by a parent and often clingy when the parent returns.

There may be a problem if, by 18 months, your child:

- does not show a preference for familiar people
- does not show separation anxiety.

By two years children are usually:

- starting to explore more widely, opening doors and drawers
- playing near other children, but not yet with other children (unless the other child is older and able to adapt her play to fit the two year old)
- unable to share
- very fearful of separation
- dependent on a comforter, such as a dummy.

There may be a problem if, by two years, your child:

- does not show awareness of different people.

Motor skills

By 18 months children are usually:

- walking skilfully, but also often falling if they try to run fast
- climbing onto low furniture
- able to push a toy, such as a trolley
- able to put one object, such as a block, deliberately onto another
- starting to scribble with a pencil
- able to pick up small objects.

There may be a problem if, by 18 months, your child is:

- not yet walking.

By two years children are usually:

- able to run fast without falling over when turning corners or stopping
- squatting steadily to pick up objects from the floor

- able to bring a small chair to the table and sit on the chair at the table
- able to walk backwards pulling a toy or trolley.

There may be a problem if, by two years, your child is:

- not walking steadily, especially if the child has a limp.

Speech and language

By 18 months children are usually:

- babbling loudly and often to themselves and to others, as though having a conversation
- listening to things said to them, and understanding some things, such as 'no'
- able to understand a few simple words and sentences such as 'sit on the chair'
- able to identify a few familiar objects when they are named (such as 'show me the ball' or 'where is the spoon?')
- using no less than seven and up to 20 recognisable words (the words may be quite unclear, but the primary caregiver is able to tell what is meant by the sound).

There may be a problem if your child:

- is not babbling often
- is not starting to use some meaningful words
- does not listen when others are talking to him.

By two years children are usually:

- able to use over 50 recognisable words consistently
- listening to things that are said to them
- starting to put two words together, such as 'daddy's car'
- joining in with familiar songs
- babbling while playing, with a few recognisable words in the babble.

There may be a problem if your child:

- is still mostly silent while playing
- does not respond when others talk to him
- is not able to point to objects when they are named
- uses signs, grunts or gestures only when he wants something.

Note: Children are different and may develop at different rates. So if your child does not do all the things in this topic, it may be because your child is working on some different area of his learning and development at present. However, children usually follow the same pattern of development, and it is good to have reassurance that your child is developing normally in their own unique way.

If your child is very different from other children, if you are worried about your child's development or if it seems to go backwards, you should talk with a health professional about your concerns. If there is a problem, getting help and ideas early will help. Remember that what matters is to support them on moving forward from where they are now.

For more information contact:

- Local community child health nurse
See inside your baby's purple 'All About Me' book
Look in the phone directory under 'Child Health Centres'
Visit www.healthywa.wa.gov.au
- Local family doctor
- Ngala Helpline
8:00am–8:00pm 7 days a week
Telephone (08) 9368 9368
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 111 546*
www.ngala.com.au
- Parenting WA Line
Freecall 1800 654 432* (24 hour service)
www.dlhc.wa.gov.au/parents

- Raising Children Network
www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Kidsafe WA
8:30am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)
Telephone (08) 9340 8509
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 802 244*
www.kidsafewa.com.au
- SIDS & Kids
9:00am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)
Telephone (08) 9474 3544
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 199 466*
www.sidsandkidswa.org

*Calls made from a mobile may be charged at a timed rate.

This topic may use 'he' and 'she' in turn - please change to suit your child's sex.

This information, along with other child health information, is available in electronic format at www.healthywa.wa.gov.au

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability. Please contact childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au

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