

BABY ADVOCATE

At 18 months

Health

My child only says two or three words. He has had a few ear infections. Could this be affecting his hearing and speech?

- By 18 months of age, most children have at least 15 words in their vocabulary. While all children develop at different rates, it is important to contact your pediatrician with this concern. Further evaluation of hearing and speech would help you better understand your child's needs. In the meantime, to help your child develop more language, you can spend time reading to him, talking and labeling things in his environment, asking questions, listening to and following his conversation, and by singing. (AAP and Healthy Steps)

My child is touching her private parts, and it's scary and embarrassing. What can I do to get her to stop?

- Masturbation in early childhood is very normal. When a toddler explores her genitals (in boys, you may see penile erections), they find that arousal can create a pleasurable feeling. At this age, allow her to keep exploring her body. Be aware that your reaction of fear or embarrassment will suggest to her that there is something wrong or bad about her body parts or herself. (AAP)

My toddler will not drink milk from a cup, and I want to get rid of the bottle. What should I do?

- There are many different opinions about when and how a child should be weaned. In considering how you will do it, it is important to ask yourself, "What does the bottle mean to my toddler?" Is it used to soothe her, keep her quiet, help her get to sleep? If so, you need to think of new strategies to replace that meaning. Once you have committed to weaning your child, you should make it a gradual process. Begin by eliminating the bottle that is least meaningful to your child and gradually (sometimes it takes weeks) eliminate one feeding at a time. Offer a cup at snacks and meal times. Try to set gentle limits such as only providing cups away from home.

Development

Time outs do not work for my toddler. Sometimes I want to hit him because I think that will work. It worked for me when I was young. Is that okay?

- It is important for you to discuss how you were disciplined as a child and reflect on your upbringing with your partner. Each family must come to their own conclusions, but in today's violent world, it is very important to treat your child with respect from a young age. This will allow him to learn better ways to express himself. Many parents say that it worked for them, but it is a tradition that humiliates and provokes fear in children. If you find yourself so angry that you feel like you are going to hit him, put your hands together and clap—don't slap. At this age, your toddler is still too young for time outs. Try to figure out if he getting enough attention, if he has time to run around outside, and gets positive feedback for good behavior. Are the rules and the environment set up with the toddler in mind, and do they prevent bad behavior? .

My childcare provider told me that my daughter is hitting other children when she doesn't get her way. We do not hit her at home, and I don't want anyone else to think we hit her at home. What do I do?

- You know why your daughter is hitting (not getting her way), so you now can help her deal with her aggressive behavior. By narrating (using her language) what a toddler is doing and how she is feeling, you can give her a better way to express her feelings of frustration. You can model for her appropriate words like saying, "no!" or "mine" or "Stop!" (Karp). Be consistent in letting your child know that this is unacceptable behavior. When a toddler hits, you may respond by removing her from the situation or giving a time out. Toddlers begin to understand the consequences of hitting when the adult comforts the victim. Ask your childcare provider to help you do this when the child is in her care as well. Consistency is important. Your childcare provider and other parents with toddlers probably know that hitting is a normal reaction for a frustrated toddler. By showing your concern for the situation, they will know you are a caring parent.

My toddler repeats many behaviors that quickly get on my nerves (like banging two toys together). Why does he do this even when I say "no"?

- Think of the repetitive actions as "toddler physics." It is important for them to repeat actions as they learn that every action has a reaction. Through repetition of behaviors, they are learning how they function in the world. Because of this important learning process, their need to repeat is stronger than their recognition that you are saying no. Instead of allowing it to get on your nerves, try to think about all the exploratory learning that is taking place. When you say no, it should also be accompanied by a distraction so that your toddler's growing brain can focus on something else.

My child is so afraid of everyone now, even though she used to smile at everyone. I'm afraid everyone will think my child is not friendly or "spoiled." Why does she do that?

- Fear of strangers or "stranger suspicion" is very common during the toddler years. Your child is demonstrating that she now has more complex thoughts and fears. Most toddlers will grow out of this phase, but you can comfort her, give her gradual experiences with a variety of people, and keep from pushing her into interactions with adults.

When is the right time to toilet train my son? Are there signs that tell me he's ready?

- Most children are not ready to be potty trained until after age two. By waiting until the child is ready, toilet training will happen more quickly. The following signs show you that a child is ready to start toilet training:
 - His bowel movements occur on a fairly regular and predictable schedule
 - His diaper is dry for at least two hours during the day or after naps.
 - He can follow simple instructions
 - He shows an interest in imitating others in the bathroom
 - He can show you or tell you when his bladder is full
 - He can help undress himself
- (AAP)

Prevention

Is TV viewing bad for my toddler? He loves certain shows, but I worry he'll get "hooked" on the TV.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children have no screen time before the age of two. This is because young children learn best in relationships with others and need this time to play and explore. Television provides no educational benefits at this age. If your child wants a certain show, limit the amount of time he can watch it (one show per day) and sit there with him so that the two of you can interact while the television is on.

Is it too early to put my toddler in a bed? She's already crawling out of the crib, and I'm afraid she'll fall.

- When a child starts climbing out of a crib, it is good to start thinking about transitioning to a bed. Prepare your child by talking about the switch before it happens, making the switch at a low stress time, and letting her pick out her bed or bedding. To help your child get used to sleeping on a bed, you can put the mattress on the floor before transitioning to a bed with bed rails if needed.