

BABY ADVOCATE

At 12 months

Health

My baby drinks everything out of a cup but milk. How can I wean him off the bottle?

- There are many different opinions about when and how a baby should be weaned. In considering how you will do it, it is important to ask yourself, “What does the bottle mean to my baby?” Is it used to soothe him, keep him quiet, or help him 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 baby and gradually (sometimes it takes weeks) eliminate one feeding at a time. Offer a cup at snack and meal times. Try to set gentle limits such as only providing cups away from home.

My baby isn't eating much of anything anymore. When I try to feed her, she refuses to eat, and turns her head away. Is she growing enough?

- During the first year of life, your baby was physically growing rapidly. During the second year, your baby's growth will decelerate and usually corresponds with a decrease in appetite. It is normal for your baby to take in fewer calories, and even to refuse foods, be picky, or have binges. It is important for her to have independence in feeding and make her own choices with the food that you provide. Babies will choose to eat the amount they need, remember their tummy is about the size of their fist. Begin to think of the food your child is getting not in terms of meals but in terms of twenty-four hour periods. If she is consistently not getting enough food in these time periods, or if she is not gaining weight in a pattern that would be consistent with her growth chart, contact your doctor.

My baby doesn't want to go to bed on a regular schedule. He screams when we put him in his crib and won't stop until he is taken out of the crib. What can we do?

- At this age, your child might need to transition from two daytime naps to one. Your first priority will be to figure out why he doesn't want to go to bed. It may be that he needs less sleep during the day in order to be drowsier at night. Another reason your baby might scream when put in his crib is because he is over-tired and too worked up. A good bedtime ritual might include a story, rocking, and then putting the baby in his crib when he is drowsy but not asleep (allowing him to learn to fall asleep on his own). If your baby still wakes up and cries, you might let him cry it out for up to five minutes. If he cannot soothe himself, you can then go back into the room, comfort the baby without picking him up, and leave again. If parents repeat this sequence, most babies will start to cry less each night until they fall asleep on their own. You may have already been through this process with your baby, but middle of the night waking can appear with each new stress. As you teach your child to be independent during the day, it is also important to teach him independence and consistency at bedtime.

Development

My partner and I disagree on how to discipline our child. What can we do?

- Everyone enters a partnership with their own value system and it is important to recognize your different points of view as strength. This enables you to have a broader vision in raising children. It is important to talk about your different values, your own upbringings, and to communicate about what you want for your family. Remember, you don't need to convince your partner that your values are valid, but you both need to recognize the importance of developing shared outcomes and compromising on how to get there. It is most important that you present yourselves to your child as a united front that cannot be divided. Reaching a decision on how to discipline should always come before the behavior of a child is dealt with.

My baby loves to feed herself, but whenever she does, she makes a mess and throws her food. How can I encourage her independence and keep my house clean?

- It is wonderful that you are allowing your child to feed herself. It is also important to realize she might explore her food by mashing or even throwing it. Placing a plastic tablecloth under her high chair can make clean up easier. First, start by giving her small amounts of food at a time so she can get it to her mouth and not play. If she gets to the point where playing with the food is more important than eating it, then consider her mealtime done, and remove her and the food until the next snack or meal time. She will get hungry and eventually will learn to eat the food when it is offered. Remember that your toddler is extremely sensitive to your reactions to feedings, so remain calm and be consistent.

The books suggest letting a child “work out tantrums” by not interfering with a tantrum. But the tantrums in public places are embarrassing. Should I give in to her demands in public places, but ignore the tantrums at home?

- Tantrums are a normal part of the life of a toddler and occur because she is developing intense feelings and doesn't know a better way to communicate them. While you respect that and allow her to tantrum at home (while remaining present and calm), being in public is a more difficult situation. Often, public places can be over-stimulating to a toddler and bring up many anxious feelings and fears. The best way to avoid tantrums in public is to make sure that your toddler does not become overly frustrated, anxious, hungry or tired. If one does occur and your child cannot be distracted with choices, it is best to abandon your plans and remove your child from the situation. Your flexibility during this time will be important to teach your child that you are consistent and will not give in, regardless of the place. This is also an important age to make sure that you are only saying “no” to the non-negotiable, and that you pick your battles—don't be afraid to accommodate the small things both at home and in public.

Prevention

My baby is trying to crawl out of the crib. Is it too soon to transition him to a bed?

- First, it is important to put cushions or mats around his crib as you never know when your child will figure out how to climb out of his crib. At this age the mattress should be at its lowest level. If you believe he is able to climb out you may decide that you need to put the crib rails down so that he can climb out without hurting himself, or you may decide to put the mattress on the floor. The biggest issue is that of safety once he gets out, so make sure his room is fully safety-proofed and that a gate keeps him from getting to the rest of the house. For many babies, crawling out of the crib becomes a battle for attention. Transitioning to a bed would not solve the problem. If your baby begins to crawl out, return him to the crib, lie him down, and say, "It's time to go to sleep." Immediately leave the room. You may have to go in over and over for many nights, but eventually he will learn that he is gaining nothing and will begin staying in his crib or bed.

How can I keep my baby safe without putting everything in our house away?

- As babies of this age are learning to move and explore their world, they are usually unable to stop themselves from touching things. It would be easier to put the breakables away for a while in order to have fewer conflicts. As a baby learns the meaning of no, you will want "don't touch" to be reserved for safety issues such as the oven or the radiator. Your breakables can still be on display out of baby's reach or in a specific room that is off limits. Your baby will learn best and have fewer conflicts over objects if there is room in the house for him to explore freely and safely.

Does my child need to go to the dentist, now that she has a few teeth?

- During well child visits, your doctor will check your child's teeth and gums and will refer you to a dentist if there are problems. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that your child begins seeing a dentist for regular check ups during the early toddler years. A few dentists are willing to see 12 month olds. A trip to the dentist should occur earlier if your child chips or injures a tooth, has an injury to the mouth, or has discoloration in a tooth (this may indicate tooth decay).