



First Steps

23 Months

Advice to Mom

- Polish up your sense of humor. A good belly laugh will get you through tough days easier.
- Whenever possible turn potential confrontations into games.

Key Thought

You are your child's first and most important teacher. What you are teaching her now lays the foundation for her future learning. Your example, as well as the words you use, instill in her a love for learning and a zest for life. Keep up the good work you are doing with her.

What Your Toddler is Learning And How You Can Help

Physical Development:

Skills she is learning or perfecting include bending over from the waist to pick things up off the floor, instead of squatting, jumping with both feet off the floor, and standing on tip toes. She is beginning to be able to throw overhand, although she will seldom hit the target.

Throwing a Ball—*Hand-eye coordination, balance and agility all improve with ball practice.* Practice playing with a ball. Start with rolling, then bouncing, then throwing underhand, and finally throwing overhand. Use soft spongy balls or beanbags. She may really enjoy an indoor bowling set now.

Dressing—She has been able to undress herself and help to put on some clothes. *Besides the physical skills, she is learning to be independent and self-sufficient as she learns to dress herself.*

Choose clothes for her that are loose fitting, elastic waists, and with Velcro closers to ease learning to dress herself. Whatever she can do for herself, let her do it—even if it takes her longer and she sometimes does it wrong.

The best way to teach her a complicated new skill like putting on her socks, is action by action. There are 5 parts to putting on socks: Getting the sock ready to put on, starting it over the toes, stretching it along the foot, getting it over the heel, and finally pulling it up. Teach her the steps in reverse. You do everything up to pulling it up her leg. When she can do that well, help her learn to get it over her heel and up her leg. Then start it over her toes and let her finish the job. Be sure to praise her for any progress she makes in learning this and other new skills.

Fine-motor skills— She can now complete a 3-6 piece jigsaw puzzle. She can draw vertical and horizontal lines and is beginning to be able to draw a circle. She can build a block tower of six or more blocks and string large wooden beads on a cord.



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Language Development:

She is making three-word sentences now. She is fascinated by opposites like: big, little or short, tall. She should be able to follow a two-part request, like “Pick up the book and put it on the shelf.”

She is expanding her concept of ownership. “Mine” may be one of her favorite words. She will probably still be avoiding using the pronoun I and use me or her name in its place. She may be able to answer the question, “What is your name?”

When she is talking to herself you will hear different patterns now. She may begin with rhyming sounds, then switch to same first sounds, later she may be substituting words in a sentence like, “Play cars,” “Play ball,” “Play blocks,” “Play cat.”

Pushing her to correct mispronounced words can make her self-conscious and less willing to try new words. Instead of repeating the word over and over and trying to get her to say it correctly, try playing games with the word. Try using the word to make silly rhymes or use it in a familiar song. Let her join in the *fun* of saying the word, instead of struggling with the *work* of saying it correctly.

She is eager to learn new words. She has two reasons for raising her tone at the end of a word. First, she may be asking you to verify that it is the correct word. Her second reason is that she wants a little more information about it. Use the word in a sentence, say its opposite, or add descriptive words around it. Don't flood her with information, just a few more words will satisfy her for now.

If you have not yet chosen the words you want her to use for her toilet needs, do it now. Talk matter of factly using the words you've decided on whenever she needs a diaper change or when she sees her potty chair, etc.

Social Development:

The awareness that she belongs and that she really matters are vitally important to her developing self-confidence. Knowing she is part of a group, has friends, and a family that love her help her have a solid platform for interacting with her world. You can help her to know she is important as you teach her the importance of everyone doing their part. Her chores at this point may be putting her blocks in a bin or carrying a small bundle for you. Being able to do things for herself, like feeding herself and putting on her clothes assure her she is important too. Taking time to train her, giving her limits, and goals all help her feel important.

What to Expect Next

- Arranging things by category
- Aware of gender differences
- Jumps with both feet off the ground

Prayer

Heavenly Father, let me see the joys of this age and not just the challenges! Show me how to guide her budding independence. In Jesus' name, Amen



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Intellectual Development:

Her memory has improved greatly. Now she can remember, even hours later, where a favorite toy was put. She associates things in the real world with pictures she has seen in a book. She enjoys pretend play like eating a pretend fruit and telling you it tasted yummy.

T.V. programs, even those made for children, cannot help your child develop intellectually nearly as much as having parents who talk and listen to them. Verbal exchange is the foundation for intellectual development.

The brain controls individual muscle movements, coordination of the signals to the muscles so they act together to do complex motions, and sequential thought. These centers of activity are very closely related in the brain. What that means to you as a parent is that as you help your child learn new and more complex muscular activity, you are stimulating the part of her brain that is necessary for sequential thought. In order to learn well in school, children must learn sequences.

Thanks to *Growing Child* * for some games that will help your child with coordination.

1. Place three objects into your toddler's cradled arms, like a small ball, a block, and a shoe. Then name an object and ask her to give it to you without dropping the other two. If she is successful, let her load you up and choose an object for you to give her.
2. Cut some footprints out of paper. Place them on the floor and carefully put your feet on each paper footprint. Your toddler will want to try to follow you. Move the footprints around into more and more complex patterns.
3. Have your spouse roll a ball across the floor in front of you while you hold a cardboard box upside down. As the ball approaches, drop the box so as to trap the ball inside. This game will take your toddler a long time to be able to do. Learning to release the box in anticipation of the ball's arrival takes advanced planning.
4. Do different things with balls in each hand. Try patting one and rolling the other around at the same time. When she is able to do this, show her how to roll two golf balls toward each other so they collide.
5. Set two boxes on the floor and try to fill them with small objects. They must pick up an object with each hand and drop them simultaneously into the two boxes.
6. Try picking up an object between her two flat palms without closing her fingers around it. Then try with one hand and one foot together.

Food Fights

How much food is enough?

The average serving for a two-year old is 1/4 the size of an adult serving. This is a very small amount! Her total calorie intake for the day should equal about 40 calories for every inch of height. If the average two year old is 34 inches (86 cm), her calorie intake should be 1,360. Toddlers often eat almost nothing one day and a huge amount another. Consider her food intake by the week rather than by the day.

Who controls her eating?

You want to teach your child to know when she is hungry and when she has eaten enough. If you control when and how much, you are setting her up for eating problems later in life. Children are amazingly good at self-regulation, if allowed to choose for themselves.

* *Growing Child*, Dunn & Hargitt, Inc., 1980



First Steps

23 Months

Food Choices

It is your child's decision whether to eat or not. It is your responsibility to provide healthy, tasty food in a form she can eat. Always make one option something you know she likes. The less comment about food and the way it is eaten the better.

Some simple rules that make mealtime more enjoyable for everyone:

- Food is eaten in a chair at the table. (Children may be served at a different time than adults or even at a child-sized table.)
- One meal is served. At least one choice should be something your toddler likes to eat. Don't get in the habit of cooking one meal for your toddler and another meal for you.
- No throwing food or screaming at the table. One warning may be given and then she is taken out of her seat and put on the floor.
- Desserts are *not* a reward for eating healthy food. They may or may not be served, but don't make them a reward.
- Clear the table of food after the meal.
- Only nutritious snacks are served and they are served at the table, especially when she has not been eating well. (These count toward the total calorie/nutrition intake for the day.)

Taming the Terrible Twos

Your toddler is discovering she is a separate person from you. She is practicing her assertiveness skills while her impulse controls are not yet developed. She may be defiant with *you* because she trusts you. Does this sound confusing? It is for both you and her.

After this period, there will be a break for a number of years and then this process will be completed in adolescence. Setting good foundations now will make that final transition easier. At this stage, she needs to know that there are limitations that will be enforced. Inside those limitations there is great freedom to enjoy life. This is a major life lesson she is beginning to learn now.

Pick your battles. Win the battles you pick and let her have her way with the less important choices. She must know when you say there is no choice, you mean it.

Here are some things she doesn't understand:

She doesn't understand time, so "later" is meaningless to her. She lives in the here and now. She doesn't understand reasons for rules. When it is something she must do, don't allow a choice or discussion.

She doesn't understand long explanations.

She doesn't understand the consequences of what she does.

Here are some things she does understand:

She understands reasonable boundaries. She needs to know she doesn't always get her way. She understands specific, doable, clear instructions.

She understands you mean what you say when you follow through immediately.

She understands you better when you get on eye level with her and look in her eyes.

She understands better when she has visual and physical cues about what she is to do.

She understands it is time to change activities better if she has some warning it is coming.

You lead by example. Keeping your own temper under control and finding the funny side of things will help your toddler learn to do the same.