



First Steps

2 Years — 1 Month

New Focus

At this age, children develop in very different ways. Some seem to concentrate almost exclusively on language skills while letting other skills stagnate. Other children concentrate on motor skills, either large or small muscles, and are not interested in using any more language than absolutely necessary. “Normal” development is a wide range from here on.

I will continue to write and send First Steps monthly, but will not focus so much on the development that should be happening month by month and rather on more articles of interest during a three to six month period. In other words, some things I discuss in this month’s newsletter, may not be an issue for you and your child for three to six months from now.

When there are age appropriate markers, I will continue to send them. Use these to determine if there is need to alert your pediatrician to specific problems in your child’s development.

I hope to continue making this newsletter as practical and helpful as possible. If you have specific questions that you would like answered personally or as a topic for a future newsletter, please feel free to write to me anytime.

Milestones for 2 years:

- Pointing to an object that you name.
- Recognizing the names of familiar people, objects, and body parts.
- Using short phrases and two to four-word sentences.
- Following simple instructions.
- Repeating words she overhears.
- Finding an object hidden under two to three blankets.
- Sorting objects by shape or color
- Playing make believe.

If your child does not meet any of these milestones be sure to tell your pediatrician.

Speech Delay and Impaired Hearing:

A specific area of concern at this age is your child’s hearing. The best way to know if there is any hearing impairment is to observe her speech development. It is estimated that 5% of children are hard of hearing, not including children with mild hearing loss.

A child who cannot hear well will have difficulty learning to talk and to understand the meaning of the sounds she hears. Even if she is alert and intelligent she will be slow to learn to talk. Even a mild hearing impairment will influence her learning now and in the future. Since this is the year with the most rapid speech development, it is vital that she hears as well as it is possible for her to.



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If by this age your child is not speaking, has a vocabulary of less than 50 words, or is almost impossible to understand, it is vital that you have her hearing tested. Make an appointment with your doctor. Be ready to answer the following questions:

- How much and what kinds of things does she seem to be able to hear?
- How well does she see?
- What letters or sounds seem to be missing from her speech?
- How many words or phrases does she say?
- Who can understand her, only family and caregivers?

Your doctor will probably refer you to an audiologist who can test your child with specialized instruments for a thorough diagnosis.

Stuttering and Stammering:

Another area of concern for many parents during this year is the sudden appearance of stuttering or stammering. 90% of children who start to stutter between 2-3 years outgrow it in a few months. It is not a serious problem. But since it can be very frightening to parents when it suddenly starts, we want to help you know what you should and shouldn't do about it.

Stuttering at this age is mostly caused by your child's intelligence outstripping her verbal ability. When she is extremely excited, tired, angry, or upset, she has trouble putting her thoughts into words.

What should you NOT do?

- Don't say, "Speak slower" or "Take your time" or "Try it again" or "Say it like this." These only cause her to self-monitor her speech and creates more tension.
- Don't emphasize speech. Let her develop has her own pace. Help her focus on learning more physical skills for the time being.
- Don't rush to a doctor or speech therapist. If it is true stuttering, there is plenty of time to correct it before she starts school.

What SHOULD you do?

- Check daily routines to see if anything in particular is making her tense.
- Give her opportunities to talk with other children, not just adults.
- Relax and don't worry. She is very sensitive to your moods.
- Tell your doctor if she is tensing her jaw or making odd facial grimaces, twitching or blinking when she stutters. These may indicate true stuttering that would be helped by speech therapy.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help me to take advantage of my child's desire to help. Give me the patience I need to wait for her and not to overly correct her first attempts to learn new skills. Help us learn to work together joyfully. In Jesus' name, Amen.



The Window of Opportunity

“I want to help!”

You have a brief window of opportunity to teach your child how to help and to love to help. You have heard parents of teenagers complain that their teens never help with anything around the house or want to do anything for anyone else. The cause of their problem happened when their child was a toddler.

When a little one says, “I want to help!” You must accept her offer and take advantage of it. It will mean extra cleanups for you, but that is a small price to pay. If you do not allow her to help, teach her ways to help, and encourage her joy at helping, she will quit offering. This is not an offer that will be repeated later in childhood. If you miss this window of opportunity, it will never be available to you again.

So, Mom, take the time to let her help you! Each skill she learns and enjoys is practice for bigger responsibilities later. If you are dusting, give her her own dust rag and let her “work” along with you. Talk to her all the time you are both working. Explain what you are doing, how to do it, and why you do it. She learns a new skill, new vocabulary, and proper grammar. When you put toys away, tell her what you are doing—first, second, and third. Talk about the sizes of toys—the big ones, medium sized ones, and small ones. Have her do the bending and stretching for you.

Don’t make commands of her when she is offering to help. Make a dance or game out of the chore. She will see it as enjoyable time with you doing something that makes you smile and reward her with hugs. The good feelings she gets for helping you now will make her want to help you when she is older and more capable of “real” help.

A Boy Becomes a Little Man

At 18 months we talked about the importance of boys identifying with their dad. By this time, your son should be easily identified as his daddy’s boy. He should be trying to copy how his dad does things and trying to walk like him and talk like him. Let your husband know how very important he is to his son’s development. Impress on him the importance of his acceptance of his son and his affirmation that he is growing to be a man like him.

If your husband must be away from home a lot and your son has very little time with him, you will have to make a great effort for them to have time together when possible and help your son know what daddy likes and how daddy does things.

If your son cannot be around his dad, you must find good male role models for him to identify with. Perhaps a grandfather, uncle, or even a close family friend can take a special interest in your son’s development as a boy. Between 18 and 30 months is the window of opportunity for your son’s identity as a male to develop a healthy foundation.



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Activities:

The Reasoning Game

Slight of hand games are great activities for 2 year olds. She is now ready for some new more complex tricks. We have suggested hiding toys under different covers for her to find. Now she can learn more about cause and effect.

Show your child a coin and a ball of clay or play dough. Then under a cover, completely cover the coin with the clay. Then show her the ball of clay and ask her where the coin is. She most likely won't be able to figure it out at first. To help her figure it out, show her a coin purse and a coin. Under a cover put the coin in the purse. Show her the purse and ask her where the coin is. Since she may have seen something like this before, she may be able to find it fairly quickly. Then show her a matchbox and a coin. Hide the coin in the matchbox and see if she can find it. Then give her the ball of clay again and see if she begins to try to "open" the clay. If not, you may take another ball of clay and twist it into two halves and shape it into little cups. Then give her the ball of clay with the coin and see if she finds the coin now. Once she finds the coin in the clay easily whenever you do this. Show her a card and a book. Hide the card in the inside cover of a book. See how long it takes her to find it. She understands the principles she has been learning when she applies them to new situations.

Another step in this reasoning game is making a false bottom cup for hiding small things. Take a paper cup and tape a false bottom about 2/3 of the way down inside the cup. Leave a space big enough to slip a small object below the false bottom. Put something soft that won't rattle around in the bottom. At first she may think it is empty. Eventually she will realize that the inside is shorter than the outside and begin to poke at the paper in the bottom. She will be pleased when she finds the surprise.

Play, Play, Play

Two year olds are constantly learning. Play is her work. So encourage her play.

- Encourage her to continue to explore things around the house.
- Stimulate her senses with tactile toys like sand, clay, and water. Encourage her to play instruments like xylophones and maracas.
- Take her to new places like the zoo, a kid-friendly museum, a petting farm, and a swimming pool.
- Provide structured play like in a play group or arts and crafts class
- Provide opportunities for unstructured play like role playing being a doctor, a teacher, or a clown
- Motor skills develop at a playground or in learning to ride a tricycle.
- Act out a favorite story.
- Dance together to different music