



First Steps

2 Years — 9 Months

Respect

You might think it is impossible for a preschooler to learn respect. But an almost three year old has the verbal skills to learn to show respect. She won't get it right a lot of the time, but with practice and consistent teaching, she'll become a respectful child.

Respect is not the same as fear. Respect is more than just being courteous, it is paying attention to and being kind to others.

Like all behaviors you want your child to learn, respect is taught by demonstration. One of the ways we show respect is to listen to others when they speak. You teach this kind of respect by listening to your child. Get down on her level, look her in the eye, and let her know you are interested in what she has to say. When she knows you listen to her, she'll listen to you just as carefully.

Teach her polite responses. You have probably already been teaching her to say "please" and "thank you." Use polite responses yourself and she'll catch your habit. More than just the words, teach her that you don't like it when she demands things of you. Tell her, "I like to help you more when you ask me in a nice tone of voice." "Thank you" said with a snarl is not a thankful attitude. Begin teaching attitude responses as well as verbal responses.

You can begin to teach her that she can disagree without being disagreeable. She will have her own opinion about many things, but there is a right and wrong way to express those opinions. When she says, "I won't go to the store! Take me to the park!" You can say, "I might consider going to the park, if you ask me in a respectful way." You may have to coach her to ask, "Can we go to the park after we go to the store?" If she manages something like this, you should let her know she has done well and take her to the park for a little while after shopping.

Often expressing her opinion is exercising her independence, not being disrespectful. When it really doesn't matter, try to let it pass without comment. Choosing the clothes she wears may be the way she practices being independent. It usually doesn't matter if her clothes match or are appropriate to the occasion. She'll soon enough discover for herself that some outfits really are better than others. To avoid a power struggle that ends in disrespect, you may say, "I'll just bring this along in case you change your mind." This allows her a gracious way out of a wrong opinion. You are showing her respect and she will learn to respect your opinions too.

Respect is taught by setting limits and being firm in discipline. Setting limits lets your child know there are boundaries to what she can do and say. But limits without enforcement (discipline) are really no limits at all. If she refuses to abide by the rules, you must come up with a simple, easily enforced consequence. Then always quickly and without anger make her pay the consequence. She will learn to honor the limits set by adults.



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Praise respectful behavior. When your daughter spontaneously displays respect, praise her. Be sure to be specific about what she did right. Don't just say, "good girl" or "good job." Say, "You were so polite when you said 'please' to Auntie for a drink of water." You might even add, "That made Auntie happy and me so proud of you."

Bad Word and Nasty Habits

Nasty habits and bad words often start by accident. They pick up words and habits from friends and playmates, from TV, and even from you in unguarded moments. Whining, shrieking, sticking out her tongue, hitting, biting, and bad words may get an amazingly strong, immediate reaction from you the first time she uses it. She thinks, "Wow! That was cool! I've got to try that again!"

The quickest way to make this kind of language or behavior disappear is to ignore it. The more fuss you make over it, the more you show her how powerful certain words are. She will want to use them more and more. A set habit is far harder to eradicate.

Language Skills

We haven't mentioned measurements of language skills for many months. This is a good time to evaluate her progress. Language measurements are more than just the number of words your child speaks. Here are some mile markers for this age:

- Listens to a story with pictures and stays engaged as you discuss them
- Enjoys looking at picture books, turning pages, and naming small details of what she sees
- Sings songs and knows a few nursery rhymes
- Plays pretend games and chatters sensibly to herself as she plays alone
- Can answer questions with "yes" or "no" and questions like, "What do you eat with?" or "Are you a girl or a boy?"
- Can follow a simple request
- Refers to herself using "I" and knows her first and last name
- Knows more 500 words
- Names at least one color and repeats two or more numbers correctly
- Asks questions that begin with "what," "why," "where."
- Learns new words quickly and copies words parents speak
- Names common foods and objects she has regular contact with
- Identifies body parts
- Understands size difference
- Uses three to four word sentences

If you don't think your daughter meets these goals or has suddenly stopped progressing or regressed, tell your doctor. An audiology screening (hearing test) and evaluation by a speech-language pathologist should be scheduled. He may also schedule an evaluation by a psychologist to rule out autism.

Either hearing problems or autism should be treated as soon as possible. Don't delay! The ability of your child to learn will be greatly increased by early intervention.



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Preparing for Preschool

This is the continuation of our series of steps to prepare your child for preschool.

Read to your child every day! Set aside at least 15 minutes a day for reading time. This will make reading time a familiar ritual when she starts preschool.

Since preschoolers can't read independently, they need to learn to listen. Reading aloud to her helps her develop listening skills. Stories with rhythm are particular favorites. When she can remember the repeating phrases, ask her to "read" with you.

One of the skills she will be learning in preschool is to predict the outcome of a story. You can help her prepare by stopping midway through a story and ask her about what she thinks will happen next, or how she thinks the story will end.

Get Outside and Play

Your daughter needs lots of fresh air and opportunity to play freely. She needs it as much as she needs sleep and good food. Find some time each day for her to play outdoors. Encourage her to run around and work her muscles in your own yard, a park, or a playground. Being outdoors provides sensory stimulation that she cannot have indoors like: hearing birds, feeling the dirt, letting the sun shine on her face. Give yourself a few minutes of fresh air and sunshine too. It will calm your nerves and refresh you for the rest of your day.

She should practice skills like balancing, catching a ball, coordination, and controlling her speed. Play fun games with her like Follow the Leader and Simon Says. Take a ball and play Catch. Use gym equipment that is provided in parks and playgrounds.

If there are other children at the play area, she will also be learning some social skills like taking turns and working together to make the seesaw go up and down.

Simple Science

She appreciates many things that she can't see. She can tell what is happening, even if she cannot fully understand why. Try some of the following experiments with her:

- Place a dry sponge in a saucer of water. Ask her where the water went. If she can't tell you, let her play with the sponge and water for a while. Then she should be able to tell you where the water went.
- Predicting weight. Show her some objects of different weights. Ask if she can lift the object. When an item is just a little too heavy, she'll guess that she can. Let her muscles tell her, she didn't guess correctly.
- Blowing. Ask her, "Can you blow this paper off the table?" Then, "Can you blow this block off the table?"



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Good Mom!

There have been lots of studies of how mothering styles and different events in a child's life influence our child's development. Some of us are really laid-back and relaxed in our parenting style. Some are more structured and demanding of ourselves and our children. Some children have faced really difficult, upsetting events in their short lives. These studies have some interesting results.

We'll take a few of the different approaches and see the outcomes.

If a baby was bottle or breast fed or at what age they began to eat solid foods had little or no effect on eating problems later in life. What did seem to lead to feeding problems later were strict potty training methods, resisting the child's desire for affection, and showing little warmth and gentleness toward the child.

Children who had high expectations put on them for early potty training more often became bed wetters later on. But even if high expectations were placed on the child very early, if the mom was warm and gentle in the process, they less often became bed wetters.

Far more important than a single traumatic event or a series of upsetting events like strict potty training, is the overall attitude and approach that parents take to their children over many months or years. How well parents think of themselves and each other and how satisfied they are with their parenting role plays a very significant part in determining what their children will be like.

So, even when you have a really bad day with your child, don't feel you have scarred her for life. We all have good days and bad days, days when we feel good about being a mom and days when we hate it. Even if you cannot think of one good thing about some day, be content that you got through it. Sometimes that counts as a successful day. Tomorrow can be much better.

Just do not hover over your child, constantly trying to protect her. Don't constantly be asking yourself, "Is she doing all right?" Don't pressure your child to perform at ever higher levels. Don't make her feel that you only love her when she performs well. These attitudes really do affect your child.

Be a good mom! Enjoy your daughter, laugh with her, and hold her close. Make sure she knows that you love her because she belongs to you! These attitudes will cover a lot of mistakes and tough days.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please forgive me when I lose my temper or push my child too hard. Give me a heart that overflows with love and gentleness toward my little one. Give me the wisdom to know how to relax and enjoy being a mom. In Jesus' name, Amen.