



What You Can Do to Support Babies' Brain Development From 18 to 24 Months

Language

Toddlers vary greatly in their paths to understanding and using language. Between 18 and 24 months, toddlers can usually say around 50 words. They then begin adding several new words to their spoken vocabulary every day, and begin putting two words together, such as “more milk.” If you are concerned about a language delay, talk with the child’s family and suggest an evaluation by a health care provider or child development specialist.

Talk with your toddlers. This is one of the most important ways you can help children develop language skills! Talk as you play and go through your daily routines together.

Take the time to listen to your toddlers. Toddlers' speech can be slow and difficult to understand. Be patient, and try to really understand what they are saying.

Repeat, expand, or restate what the toddler says. This lets the child know that you are listening and trying to understand what he says, and encourages him to keep talking.

Read to your toddlers every day. Also tell stories from your culture, history, and experiences. Sing and use rhymes, finger plays, and poems in your daily routines.

Thinking Skills

Toddlers do a lot of imitating at this age. They learn a variety of skills by copying what they see you do. Imitation is especially important because it is a key step in understanding the use of symbols as stand-ins for the objects and things they experience. For example, they will pick up a toy phone and hold it to their ear and babble away. As toddlers near age 2, you might see them engage in pretend play like saying “hello” to a doll or pretending to eat a plastic apple. The ability to understand symbols depends on many areas of the brain maturing across the second year and beyond.

Encourage imitation. You can do this by acting as a good role model, showing children how to be patient in working through a challenging task.

Provide “hands on” experiences. These might include sand and water table play, lay dough, finger paints, and so on.

Provide props that encourage imaginative play. Useful objects include: toy telephones, food, hats, and dress-up clothes.

Resist pressure to “teach” toddlers specific academic skills such as colors and shapes. They will learn these concepts through their everyday play and interaction with you. For example, ask if they want a red or green apple, or point out shapes and colors as you take a walk around the house or outside: “Do you see the street sign shaped like a triangle?”



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Social-Emotional Development

At about 18 months, toddlers begin developing self-awareness, or an understanding that they are separate individuals. That's why the proclamations "me" and "mine" are all the rage at this age. Toddlers are experiencing a need for more independence now that they can do more for themselves. Their capacity for self-control is just beginning to develop during this period. Although toddlers probably understand you when you tell them not to take from others, they have a very difficult time stopping themselves from doing it. For all of these reasons, learning to share and cooperate at this age is still challenging for toddlers. They need your help and guidance to manage their emotions and to make good choices.

Have age-appropriate expectations for sharing. If possible, provide multiples of children's favorite toys (such as trains) to reduce sharing conflicts. Help the children take turns. Use a timer so the children can see when it will be their turn and to help them learn to wait.

Play sharing and turn-taking games. Interesting games for toddlers include rolling a ball back and forth to each other and taking turns adding a block to the tower.

Use distraction or redirection to calm or avoid disputes. Offer the child who needs to wait another activity to engage in.



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Movement

Toddlers are making great strides in using both their *fine motor* (fingers and hands) and their *large motor* (arms and legs) skills during this time. When toddlers use objects such as pencils and crayons, they are practicing their fine motor skills. To develop their large motor skills, toddlers need the freedom to move about indoors and outdoors. This allows them to explore their surroundings, improve their coordination, and develop new physical skills such as running, jumping, and climbing.

To Promote Fine Motor Skills

Offer opportunities to draw, paint, or write. Toddlers can do this with markers, pencils, or crayons.

Provide toys and materials that require the use of fingers and hands. Good items include crayons, dolls and doll clothes, nesting toys, puzzles, and play dough. Toddlers can snap together blocks; string chunky beads; and play with small blocks, small toy figures, and toy cars.

Encourage children to help with dressing and to use a spoon and fork. These experiences build fine motor skills.

Provide opportunities to grasp, hold, pour, scoop, and squeeze. Sand and water table play is one way to allow for these experiences.

Encourage toddlers to turn the pages of books as you read with them. Chunky board books are still best to use with this age group to avoid ripping pages.

To Promote Large Motor Skills

Provide plenty of opportunities to walk, run, climb, and explore-- both indoors and outdoors.

Create a soft, safe indoor play area. You can do this using pillows, mats, and mattresses.

Have toddlers build forts and other indoor play structures. Provide large blocks and blankets to help them do this.

Make safe obstacle courses. If safe challenges are not provided, toddlers will often find or create their own that might not be safe.