



TODDLER DISCIPLINE TIPS

By Judy Arnall

Toddlerhood (ages one to three) is a time when many parents seriously consider discipline strategies. It's a developmental stage when the child's tasks are to explore their world, express emotions, and attach to family. It's also a time when toddlers can't share, throw tantrums, and hitting/biting behaviours peak. Yet, toddlers are still babies and have times when they are especially clingy, and don't wish to separate from parents, preferring the safe haven and security that familiar people provide. Toddlers have extreme mobility (they can climb now!) and low awareness of danger, as well as terrible self control, and all combined with an intense drive to explore their entire surroundings with all their senses: mouth, eyes, touch, and hearing. It helps for parents to remember that toddlers do not have higher order thinking skills of trying to manipulate parents or consideration of safety. Because they are so egocentric, they behave in order to get their needs met and it's age-appropriate that they can't consider other's feelings yet.

Ideal approach to toddler discipline: Action!

- **Re-direct, Substitute, and Distract.** These tools work really well because the child's memory is so limited. Dangle something exciting in front of them and they can easily be distracted. Sometimes, you just have to pick them up and move them.
- **Childproof.** It's much easier for you and your breakables. Toddlers have so little self-control right now.
- **Give information.** Talk to your child in simple language. "Hitting hurts!" "No biting people! Here, bite this!" "Let's play here."
- **Model.** Toddlers are great imitators. Model making amends, hugs, gentle behavior, forgiveness, sharing, and respectful anger management.
- **Give attention.** Lots of it! Let them help you with chores, play with them, and nurture them when they are sick, hurt or upset.
- **Help the child deal with their intense overwhelming feelings** of anger, frustration, and sadness by removing them from the source, holding and cuddling them, modeling calmness and offering soothing words and touch. Now is not the time to isolate them in time-out. They need you! Acknowledge their feelings: "You were angry when that child took your truck!" That's okay. Let's breathe. "We can't hit, but lets find another truck."
- **Meet your needs!** Parents have to look after their own wellbeing to regenerate their patience, before they can consistently meet the needs of their children. Take deep breaths to calm down. Phone a friend or take time for yourself.
- **Constant supervision.** It is amazing and terrifying how quickly a toddler can discover a hazardous situation.
- **Prevention-think ahead.** Try to anticipate the times and places that your toddlers' behaviour deteriorates and have a plan.

Parents can benefit from understanding the child's typical stages of development in the areas of cognitive, emotional and social skills. The toddler years are delightful, and tiring, but very rewarding!

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Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery She specializes in **“Parenting the Digital Generation”** www.professionalparenting.ca (403) 714-6766 jarnall@shaw.ca

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