



Toddlers are children aged between one and three years and if you have one you know they are very active and curious. They like to explore, touch, open, shut, throw and empty, all the while learning who they are and how things work. Toddlers long to feel safe but want to be free and in charge of themselves; learning to walk, talk, feed themselves, toilet train. You may have experienced them trying out their wills and skills, attempting to become separate independent little people. Within a short space of time they can move from being independent and “I do myself” to being very needy and dependent again. At this age, they are beginning to learn about feelings and about living with others; starting to learn how to show love, how not to hurt others, how to share and take turns.

Toddlers are not able to understand our adult reasons; they cannot understand why we want them to do one thing, and not another particularly when the other seems much more interesting. They cannot easily sit still, wait, share or control their feelings; they cannot do them well yet but they will learn all these things with time and consistent management. Toddlers are often experiencing strong emotions but do not have the cognitive understanding of these feelings and what they should do with them nor do they possess the language to explain them, so they use their behaviour to tell you how they are feeling (e.g. tantrums when they are frustrated or angry). Finally, toddlers cannot stop themselves from doing what we know is the wrong thing but what they may feel is the fun or interesting thing; they still need adults to remind them and to keep them safe.

There are some common behaviour problems of toddlers:

- whinging/whining
- tantrums see handout on Toddlers and tantrums for management ideas
- hurting others - biting, hitting, pushing
- difficulties sharing

- bedtime difficulties- going to bed or staying in their own bed
- toilet training difficulties
- eating/mealtime difficulties

And here are some tips to keep you sane in the process and increase positive outcomes:

1. Make your statements or requests to toddlers in the positive rather than the negative as the toddler often won't process the whole sentence- rather than say “Don't go over to the door” say “come over here”. This is much easier for their brains to understand and you will be more likely to get compliance.
2. If your child does not follow your directions make sure you have their attention - go closer to them, get their eye contact and possibly touch them rather than call out across the room
3. If the issue is not negotiable and the child doesn't have a choice don't give them a choice - e.g. don't say “would you like to pick up the toys for mummy?” as you will likely get a “no” and you have given them the choice and set yourself up for a battle. Just say firmly and calmly- “let's pick up the toys then we can play with something else”. Start picking them up and encourage your toddler to join you in this
4. Give them your positive attention when they are doing what you require of them
5. Stay calm when dealing with difficult behaviour and minimise the attention they get for this
6. Tell them firmly what you require and help them carry this out - perhaps model what is required – “we pat the puppy gently” - take their hand and show them how to do it
7. Be persistent and be consistent
8. Help children learn about feelings and how to express them
 - Give names to feelings for your young child so that they learn that feelings are something that you can talk about and learn to manage. For example you could say, “*You're feeling sad because Daddy had to go to work*” or “*I can see you're feeling very angry*”.
 - Read stories that provide examples of children with different kinds of feelings - angry, happy, sad, afraid etc.
 - Separate feelings from behaviour. For example you might say “*I know you feel angry but you must not hit. When you feel angry you can come and tell me*”.
 - Begin to help children understand the difference between their own feelings and the feelings of others. For example you could say “*It hurts the kitty when you hit him, let's pat him very gently (show them how to do this) and make him feel better*”.

9. Plan ahead for outings you know may be a problem; like shopping, visiting friends or having friends visit you.
 - Try to make sure they are not over tired and don't over stay their tolerance
 - Prepare them for the trip and tell them what is going to happen
 - If you plan on giving them a reward for good behaviour tell them what is expected and what they will get
 - Take a toy of interest with them to give them something that interests them
 - When you go shopping you could involve them by giving them little tasks to do like holding things for you or pointing out various things
If you try a new behavioural strategy, be prepared to apply it for a good week consistently before you can evaluate whether it is working. Be aware that the behaviour you are trying to change usually worsens initially (increases in frequency or severity) as the child is usually confused about the change and they need to learn that you are going to stick to the strategy consistently. If after a week you are not seeing any improvement then it is time to try a new strategy feelings of others. For example you could say *"It hurts the kitty when you hit him, let's pat him very gently (show them how to do this) and make him feel better"*.
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Useful Parenting websites:

- Parent Easy Guides (<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/parenting-and-child-care/parenting/parenting-sa/parent-easy-guides/>)
Contains detailed behaviour management advice and tip sheets
- Initiative parents resources (<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/>) Contains many downloadable resources for parents in relation to children's mental health and wellbeing.
- Positive Parenting Resources (<https://positiveparenting.com/parenting-advice/>)
- Australian Childhood Foundation (<https://www.bringingupgreatkids.org/en/u>)
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (<http://www.aifs.gov.au/>)
- Early Childhood Australia (<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/>)
- Families Australia (<http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/>)
- Family Relationships (<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/>)
- Raising Children Network (<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>)
- Parenting Teens (<http://parentingteens.about.com/>)
- Parentlink (<https://www.parentlink.act.gov.au/home-spf2>)
Government advise site for parenting children and teenagers

Author: Terri Sheldon

Terri Sheldon is a psychologist with over 25 years clinical experience. She works in private practise on the Gold Coast in Queensland. To read more about the authors visit www.terrisheldon.com.au

