
BACK TO BASICS

What it's like to be a toddler

12 to 18 months

- I can take my first steps without holding on to your hand. In another few months, I'll run and climb up steps without falling down but will still need your help backing down from high places.
- I can say 15 or more words and like to repeat them often. My favorite words are *mine* and *no*.
- I rely on you to talk to me about the things I'm learning about in my world. Please use lots of nouns to tell me the names of things and verbs to tell me what things do.
- I'm beginning to use one hand more than the other—for feeding myself, for scribbling with a marker, and for stacking blocks.
- I use my *lovey* to comfort myself during difficult times. Please don't make my challenges even harder by telling me to put my lovey away because I'm too old to need it.
- I still need lots of rest and may be cranky if I don't sleep enough.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN GAETZ



- I can drink from a cup with only a few spills.
- I'm beginning to learn what's allowed and what's not, but still have trouble remembering the rules.
- I need you to hold, comfort, sing, and snuggle with me often.

18 to 24 months

- I'm still mostly interested in myself and my unique and independent investigations of my environment. This is why I say, "Me do it" so often.
- I like running, throwing, and climbing. I need to practice, but watch me carefully because I'm not always steady and balanced.
- When I'm tired, angry, frustrated, or overwhelmed, I may have a tantrum or bite or hit someone. I don't want to hurt but do want to protect my space and the things in it.
- I can take off my clothes and put most of them back on.
- I know what the toilet is for, but don't yet have all the necessary muscle control to use it regularly and accurately.
- I can put a puzzle of two to six pieces together accurately.
- I like to look at picture books and turn the pages myself.
- I still like saying "No," and sometimes do the opposite of what you ask. How you respond will give me information on how to respond the next time.
- I'm beginning to understand what's mine and what belongs to someone else.
- I can play next to other children but am not yet able to understand sharing or waiting for my turn.

24 to 36 months

- I like to take things apart and put them back together again.

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- I may skip my morning nap and object to one in the afternoon—but once I do settle down I enjoy and need my sleep.
 - I'm learning to master the toilet but may still have occasional accidents.
 - I'm learning words quickly and building a vocabulary of more than 500 words with your help. The more you talk to me, the better my language skills become.
 - I can put two to five words together in a sentence that you can understand.
 - I can't sit still for long.
 - I like practicing being a grownup by playing pretend games with dolls and dress-up clothes. I build skills using make-believe toys like telephones, cars, and dramatic play props like stethoscopes and traffic signs.
 - I have trouble knowing when to stop when I'm having a good time—even when it's against the rules.
 - I may want the same toys and do the same things in the same way every time.
 - I like to try new foods slowly. Give me a few chances to discover new favorites.
 - I may insist on doing things myself and cry when I can't.
 - Because I'm learning fast but don't always understand things, I'm sometimes afraid of strangers, animals, dark rooms, and noisy machines. Please stay calm, respect my feelings, and help me conquer my fears.
 - Even though I'm learning to be independent, I still need you to help me feel safe and secure. ■