

Toddlers *on the Move*

Parenting Wisdom
for Ages 12-36 Months



Dr. Scott Turansky
and Tess Worrell



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By Dr. Scott Turansky and Tess Worrell

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The Adventures of Toddlerhood

If you're reading this book, your child is likely moving from infancy into the next stage of development. The toddler stage, from about 12 months to 36 months, provides huge opportunities to teach and train your child. Brain development is happening rapidly. Both large muscles and small muscles are gaining more coordination on a daily basis. Toddlers learn to crawl, walk, jump, and run. They learn to feed themselves, use the bathroom, and sleep in a bed. Your young child will learn to come when you call, play with more cooperation, communicate more, and begin to learn what sharing means in practical terms.

Toddlers learn about God as you model and practice prayer, read the Bible, and tell exciting Bible stories. The toddler years are a time when your relationship with your child can grow quite close. The routines of correction, following instructions, and accepting no as an answer develop now, and setting good patterns at this stage in the process will help your child well into the next stages of development.

In short, the toddler years are an exciting time of rapid growth. To parent well, you must make the shift, the

parenting shift that corresponds to your toddler's development. If you continue to parent your toddler like you did in the previous stage of infancy, then you'll run into conflict, frustration will increase, and challenges will get worse.

Sharon's son David was 25 months old. He had obviously learned the word "no." He seemed out of control, running away when she called him, throwing temper tantrums when he didn't get his way, and screaming when Mom tried any form of correction. Sharon loved David immensely, although more recently her frustration with her son was testing those positive feelings.

Sharon hadn't made the shift. In infancy children develop the heart qualities of trust and security. That's why parents allow a young infant to set the schedule for feeding and respond to most cries. They know that parenting responsiveness in the early months of a child's life is what's needed. In toddlerhood children need to develop two other heart qualities: self-control and responsiveness to authority. They learn that others often set the schedule and how to share time and resources with others. In order for children to effectively move into the next stage, parents have to change the way they parent. If they continue to relate the way they did earlier, then those early methods often lack the necessary ingredients to meet the developmental needs of the child in this stage.

Sharon needed to bring some new parenting tools to her toolbox. She continued to play with and encourage her son in fun ways, and she also began to set firm limits, teach her son to come when called, and develop routines for instruction and correction. She put limits on her son's choices and practiced relating in new ways. It wasn't long before David began to make significant changes. He still

had a lot of energy, but Mom was able to bring some structure into their relationship.

That's just what David needed. The new structure provided the security and boundaries necessary to develop confidence and have a foundation upon which to explore. Although Sharon still had occasional challenges with her son, she now described the process much differently. "It used to be that we had occasional good times in the midst of mostly bad days. Now we have mostly good days with occasional problems and I feel like I now have the tools to address them."

This book is about developing tools in order to parent your toddler effectively. Most importantly, you'll learn to develop a heart-based approach that takes your child's uniqueness into account. Every child is different, but God has given each person a heart. If you'll spend time parenting from a heart-based approach, good things will happen in your child's life.

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." The question parents often wrestle with is, "What is 'the way he should go' that's mentioned in that passage?" In order to move children from where they are right now to where they need to go you'll want to have your eyes on three different factors all at the same time. First, you'll want to know your child. Second, you'll want to know where it is you're going in the whole parenting process by considering goals and objectives. Then, you'll need to know what's developmentally appropriate as you chart the course to get from where you are to where you need to be. That is the goal of this book. We've written it to equip you to understand how best to relate to your child so that you can most

effectively move your toddler through this stage to the next one while enjoying the process yourself.

So, take your time. Revisit applicable chapters when they are most needed. As you do the hard work of making parenting shifts, your toddler will benefit and so will you.



How to Pray for Your Child

Parents desire to do the very best for their children and that leads them to seek the best advice, pay for the best schooling, and purchase the best equipment. So often they wonder, “What more can we do for our children?” While all of these activities have their appropriate places, in all the doing for your children don’t overlook a key role that, in many ways, only you as a parent can fill. Take time to pray for your child.

People read the Old Testament through many lenses, each offering a unique insight into the message God has for his people. One of the most helpful lenses is to read the Old Testament through the lens of family dynamics. For example, in the Old Testament you can view God, as a father, caring for his children, the Israelites. As the story of the Old Testament unfolds you see God nurturing, training, disciplining, and loving them, often through the prophets and judges he sent to lead them.

These accounts offer huge insights for parenting. After particularly bad behavior on the part of the Israelites, they come to Samuel the prophet and beg for God’s forgiveness. His response is a beautiful example of what we,

as parents, need to remember. “Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.” (1 Samuel 12:23) Much of this toddler book focuses on teaching your children what is good and right. This chapter focuses on praying for them.

Samuel's statement reveals an important truth. Parents have a significant responsibility to pray for their kids. In fact, Samuel even says that it would be a sin to fail to pray for them. Passages throughout the New Testament likewise recognize that only God can open people to receive his truths and empower them to walk in his ways. Paul says in Ephesians 1:18, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” And in Colossians 1:9 he says, “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Both Old and New Testaments illustrate the importance of praying, and yet when it comes to their children many parents simply don't know where to begin.

If praying is awkward for you, you can begin with prayers included in the Bible. They offer eloquent requests for God's intervention in the life of believers. By praying these prayers on behalf of your children, you're guided toward God's priorities for your children's lives. Furthermore, you're in the blessed position of praying the very will of God, and you become acquainted with what God longs to do in your heart as well. Paul's letters almost always include a prayer for the particular group to whom he's writing and provide wonderful models for your own

prayers. You can pray the verse directly back to God, and may even want to insert your child's name. Take this passage in Ephesians 3:14-19, for example. You might pray it back to God this way. (Note some of the words have been changed from the actual text to make it more personal for you.)

For this reason I kneel before you Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth derives its name. I pray that out of Your glorious riches, You may strengthen (child's name) with power so that Christ might dwell in (child's name)'s heart through faith. And I pray that being rooted and established in love, (child's name) may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that (child's name) may be filled to the measure of the fullness of Christ.

This prayer not only asks God to work in your child's heart, but it also reminds parents where to focus their efforts, rooting and establishing their children in love, providing opportunities for kids to rely on God's power, and promoting the fullness of Christ in their lives. Other prayers of Paul you might consider are the ones in Philippians 1:9-11 and Colossians 1:9-12. Psalms and Proverbs also are especially helpful. You might even create your own prayer book of passages of scripture that you can use to pray for your children.

Also keep in mind that there is power in praying with others. Praying as a couple or finding a friend to pray with for your children can energize your prayer life in a way that solitary prayer may not, especially if you're trying to begin a discipline of prayer.

At the same time, don't feel you need extraordinary

expertise to pray for your children. Prayer is simply a conversation with God. Grab a cup of coffee, find a quiet spot, and take time each day to talk to God about what's on your heart for each child. Then, listen for what's on God's heart for your child. While you certainly want to pray for your children's salvation and growing commitment to follow God as well as for your ability to model godly traits, at the same time you can pray for insights as to how to teach your child to stop biting, to be more cooperative at mealtime, or for the ability of your child to sleep through the night. As you lay your requests before God, you develop a pattern of praying that not only draws your children to God, but it also does a work inside you as well. As you follow the model of Samuel above, keep in mind that as you focus on teaching what is good and right, it's also important to pray.



Planning the Toddler Transitions

“**T**iming is everything.” When raising children, this old saying provides huge wisdom. The best parenting efforts often hinge as much on the word “when” as on other words such as “what” or “how.” Knowing when to expect your toddler to be able to use a cup, move from the crib, or give up the pacifier enables you to plan for strategic transitions and to be ready when they come.

This chapter offers a general guideline for knowing when to expect certain developmental milestones. Details for making the transitions work effectively are available in the next chapter. Keep in mind as you read these paragraphs, however, that your toddler is one-of-a-kind, an incredibly unique gift from God, and he loves your child deeply. Matthew 10:29-31 says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” God knows and cares about everything in our lives, including those in toddlerhood.

Timetables offer general expectations, but children de-

velop at vastly different rates. Don't be concerned if your child moves into a stage early or needs a little more time. You must become a student of your child, learning unique tendencies, strengths, and bents. As these timetables offer insight, use them, but don't become overly stressed by deviations. Allow your child to unfold at an individualized pace. Here are some general guidelines for your consideration.

Most physicians recommend that children move from bottle to cup between a year and eighteen months. This helps protect both baby and adult teeth and less fluid opens tummy room for the more nutritious foods a growing body needs. Removing the bottle may also prevent ear infections. If your toddler hasn't made the move, you'll want to begin this process fairly quickly as it's often easier to persuade an eighteen-month-old than a two-year-old.

Breastfeeding moms have more leeway as to when to wean since the side effects of bottles aren't as likely with breastfeeding. The best time is when mom and baby are comfortable with the transition. At around nine months, fourteen months, and two years, children hit developmental milestones that may make them less interested in nursing which allows a smooth transition to cup or bottle. If your child is older than six months, you might want to choose to go straight to a cup rather than to a bottle to avert another weaning experience.

Some moms nurse until the child is four or five years old. One of the drawbacks of waiting that long, however, is that the child is old enough to make a public announcement or pull on mom's top. Should you continue nursing into this stage, you'll want to clearly communicate to your child when feeding is appropriate.

The move from a crib is an important one. Cribs pro-

vide a safe, contained place both for sleeping and quiet rest times up to age three or even older, unless you must pass the crib on to an arriving baby. Should you need to transition your toddler out of the crib for baby's use, do so fairly early in the pregnancy to avoid feelings of jealousy toward the baby. Toddlers are ready to move to a bigger bed if they've begun climbing out of the crib in the morning or after nap or if they've simply grown too big for the crib.

Relinquishing a pacifier is an important developmental step. Since it is generally considered safe for baby teeth, parents have wide latitude to act on their instincts as to the best timing for their child to give it up. Indulge the toddler's desire for his pacifier if you deem it a helpful security object, or take it away if the pacifier is proving more hindrance than help.

As children reach the one-year mark, many readily give up a pacifier as they become more engaged in trying a variety of foods or more actively playing with toys. Other children, however, become more reliant on the security of the pacifier as they move through the huge variety of changes that take place during toddlerhood. If your child needs this link to infancy in order to tackle the challenges of toddlerhood, you might want to allow the pacifier for a few additional months. Keeping the pacifier too long often runs the risk of a habit that might carry on for years.

Another transition involves dropping off the afternoon nap. Toddlers need about thirteen hours of sleep per day with one to three hours coming in the afternoon. Your child may be ready to transition away from a nap if you notice a difficulty falling asleep at either bedtime or in the afternoon. Crabbiness in the afternoon likely means that a little shut-eye is still necessary.

Many toddlers go through a stage where they don't need a nap every day, but benefit from three to four naps per week. An easy transition to this is to establish a rest time each afternoon. Tell your toddler that sleep isn't necessary but rest is, and that the timer's ring is an indication that it's okay to get up. Setting the timer for a half hour to an hour is quite reasonable for most children. A stack of picture books or a stuffed animal may be helpful to keep your child in place, and many times the playtime ends up with a nap anyway. Your toddler's rest time serves the double purpose of providing a needed break for you.

Again let's remember that every child is unique and God knows your child the best. Luke 12:7 reminds us that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Those words not only describe God's infinite knowledge but they also illustrate his great care. As you continue to do your job as a parent you can be confident that God is also very involved in your life and that of your toddler as well.



Weaning Involves More Than Just a Bottle

How do I transition my nursing-loving daughter to a cup? How do I get my little guy to give up his pacifier? How do we move to a bigger bed now that the new baby is on the way? Before parenthood, you may have laughed at adults who focused on such trivial issues. Now that it's your little one who must transition, you understand the hurdles. How do you help your toddler make the move?

Weaning baby from bottle or breast may be one of the most emotionally charged events of toddlerhood—both for you and your child. The intimacy of cuddling indelibly bonds parent and child while at the same time providing for a significant need. Nothing so clearly marks the end of infancy as moving from feeding your child to your child feeding himself. The move from bottle to cup usually takes place between twelve and eighteen months, while nursing moms have a little more leeway. A few tips can make the process easier.

It's usually best to take the weaning process slowly.

The cold-turkey approach is often quite painful and usually isn't necessary. Babies explore and connect with their world mostly through their mouths. Thus, security, nurturance, and emotional connection are highly associated with feeding times. An abrupt approach may get the job done, but also may introduce insecurity or disrupt connections. Create a weaning scenario where your toddler associates security and connection with other aspects of your relationship such as cuddling in the rocker, reading at night, and singing lullabies as you gradually remove the bottle or breast. Looking for ways to naturally move beyond oral to other senses makes your toddler more ready to connect in other ways. If you can go at your child's pace, then things usually tend to move along reasonably.

When adding the cup, introduce it one meal at a time. The easiest meal to replace is lunch. Put the good stuff in the cup (formula, juice, etc.) while putting only water in the bottle. As your toddler consistently uses the cup at lunch, add a dinner cup, then mid-morning and so on, leaving the bedtime bottle or nursing to drop off last. As you decide to reduce the evening bottle you may want to continue to dilute the milk or formula with water, making the nutritional benefit less and less. For nursing moms, reducing one feeding at a time also helps avoid engorged breasts and excessive leakage, making the process more physically as well as emotionally comfortable.

Some children use a pacifier while others won't touch the thing. Helping a child abandon the pacifier can be a challenging process for some. Matt couldn't believe his ears. After trying every trick in the book without success, his three-year-old, Kent, had just dropped his pacifier in the toilet while going to the bathroom. Looking into Matt's

eyes he said, “Uh-oh.”

“Oh, buddy. That’s really dirty now—I guess we’ll have to flush it.”

“Bye-bye, paci,” said Kent. He pulled up his pants and skipped out of the bathroom.

After all the struggle, how could it be so easy? They had tried a friend’s suggestion of clipping the end of the pacifier, only to have Kent cry until they bought another one. They coated it with a flavoring Kent didn’t like, but he simply sucked until the flavoring dissipated. He liked his pacifier so much that he had learned to talk clearly while it was in his mouth. When it seemed Kent might pack his pacifier for college, a simple drop in the toilet was the end?

Many parents worry about their child’s love of the pacifier. Will it hurt his teeth? Will it impede his speaking? Will he ever go without it? Because babies explore the world through their mouths, devices that create oral pleasure offer huge security. The comfort the pacifier brought in infancy remains strong into the toddler years. Though the data is inconclusive, most dentists believe pacifiers are safe for teeth. So, you can follow your instincts as to when to remove it.

When you decide it’s time, you’ll need to gear your technique toward your child’s personality. Some children do best if you begin by having them leave the pacifier in bed. They can use it to fall asleep or they can go in to suck on it during the day if they need a quick fix, but they learn to go through the activities of the day without it.

Others do best with a pacifier-graduation day. Pick a day, but stay away from emotionally charged days such as a birthday or holiday as the excitement surrounding those can make the toddler need the pacifier more. Look forward

to the day and regularly discuss how that will be the day to give up the pacifier. Have a big party, and then pack the pacifier in a box and mail it to a needy child in Africa.

For other children, simply waiting for the normal course of life events to remove the pacifier such as losing it on vacation, leaving it at Grandma's, or dropping it in the toilet can create the easiest transition. You may try several approaches before finding one that works for you. Fear not. Your child won't take his pacifier to college. You'll find an approach that works. In the meantime, the pacifier is a relatively harmless means for self-comfort and security.

Another common weaning experience is the move from the crib to a bed. If your toddler has grown too big for his crib, begins climbing out after a nap or in the morning, or you need the crib for another baby, moving to a bigger bed can be both exciting and scary for your toddler. Here are some suggestions to ease the transition.

You might want to begin by dropping the side of the crib so that your child gets used to an opening at the side of the bed. You may also involve your toddler in getting the new bed ready. Toddler beds closely mimic the size of a crib, fit neatly into crowded bedrooms, and often utilize the same mattress as a crib, making an easy transition both for the toddler and for the parents' wallets. Toddler beds usually come with a railing for the side. If you want to go straight to a bigger bed, you can also purchase railings for these to protect from rolling out, making your child and you feel safer.

To ease the transition to a new bed you might allow your toddler to pick out new sheets, paint, and wall hangings to create a sleeping space. Ownership of the process creates excitement for the new bed that may balance against any

fear or sense of loss of the crib.

As you transition to a new bed be careful to maintain the same bedtime routine. This helps the new situation feel familiar. Be aware that if you try to smooth the transition by lying down with your toddler, you may create expectations that this will continue. It may be better to sit on the side of the bed and rub your child's back.

Transitions such as these are all about comfort. The pacifier is a soothing tool. The bottle at night is comforting. The bed provides a place of rest, both physically and mentally. Some transitions are harder than others for anyone and we all need comfort at times. David wrote Psalm 131 and compared our relationship with God to a weaned child, emphasizing the ability to grow in receiving comfort from God himself. Verse 2 says, "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." There are lots of ways to receive comfort and even we, as adults, are learning to enjoy the comfort that God provides. As you care for your child during the weaning process, you'll be teaching your toddler very important lessons about receiving comfort that will carry on in other areas as well.



Knowing What to Expect

As parents seek to teach their children and guide their learning, they often face the danger of two extremes. They either adopt an overachieving mindset that forces the child toward accomplishments far beyond abilities, or they lazily park the toddler in front of a television, forfeiting many learning opportunities. The toddler years are a time for very rapid brain development. In some ways these young children are like little sponges. As they soak up the world around them, they begin to form an understanding of how the world works.

It's best to create an environment where you and your child explore the world as active participants. Engage your little one in a variety of activities every day. Enjoy the fun of common activities and then introduce others. As you sing, dance, read, build blocks, climb jungle gyms, and roll on the floor with your toddler, you'll see skills develop naturally and at a good pace.

To avoid pushing your little one too far too fast, you'll want to take into account developmental skills and abilities. Remember that any list of such activities can only serve as a guide. Every child is unique. Use typical growth

experiences as a baseline for evaluating where your child is on the developmental map. If your daughter is operating far ahead of these guidelines, enjoy her progress and offer incrementally more challenging activities to hone her skills. If your son seems to be a bit behind, offer opportunities to practice in those areas. The real danger of the “You can teach your baby to read” advertisements is that, if your baby doesn’t learn to read, you may consider her defective. Your child will likely excel in some areas and lag a little in others. Use differences as an indicator of preferences and as a helpful insight into who your little one is becoming. Enjoy the uniqueness. Don’t panic over where your child falls on the chart.

Even worse than pushing too early, however, is ignoring the amazing potential of the toddler years. Using television as a continual babysitter creates in your toddler’s mind the belief that the world is a maze of activity to watch passively. Instead, create a routine that encourages your toddler to actively engage, explore, and enjoy the world. Use a variety of multi-focus toys such as blocks, pots and pans, paper and crayons, dolls, and stuffed animals, as opposed to toys that merely beep and light up. Thus you’ll create a learning environment where your toddler’s imagination thrives. As you limit passive entertainment and foster active exploration, your child will naturally gravitate toward interests and develop strengths.

Here are some typical milestones to keep in mind as you chart your child’s progress through the toddler years.

Gross motor skills describe the use of large muscles in the trunk, legs, and arms. For example, you can generally expect a child to stand alone by 12 months, walk by 12-15 months, crawl up and down steps by 14-16 months, walk

backwards and up steps with help at about 16-18 months, throw a ball overhand and kick a ball forward at about 18-24 months, and jump in place by about 24 months.

Fine motor skills describe the use of small muscles in the hands and fingers. Your toddler will be able to use them to manipulate things like a spoon or to play with smaller pieces in games and toys. A toddler can usually make a tower of three one-inch cubes by around 15 months, scribble by 15-18 months, and use a spoon and drink from a cup by about 24 months.

Language development is forming rapidly during this time. Children usually have two to three words they can use (other than Mama or Dada) at 12-15 months, can understand and follow simple commands (“bring to Mommy”) at 14-16 months, and name pictures of items and animals at 18-24 months. They can also point to named body parts at 18-24 months, begin to say their own names at 22-24 months, and form two or three word sentences at 16-24 months.

A toddler’s social development involves relational tasks. A child can usually indicate some needs by pointing at 12-15 months, look for help when in trouble by 18 months, and help to undress and put things away by 18-24 months. Your toddler will also likely listen to stories when shown pictures, can talk about immediate experiences by 24 months, and can engage in pretend play and simple games by 24-30 months.

Spiritual development consists of learning trust and becoming aware of the Bible and spiritual activities such as prayer and worship. During the toddler years you’ll see your child call out to parents when help is needed, feel

safe when a parent is present, and learn to use trust in a parent as a basis for exploration. Toddlers also recognize words like “pray” and “Bible” and cooperate with and imitate parents in prayer, worship, and interest in God’s Word.

It’s important to realize that every child is unique and special. Although you may use growth charts and developmental indicators as milestones, you’ll want to remember what Psalm 139:1-3 teaches, that God knows each child and the particular bents, skills, needs, and challenges that will be faced. “O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.”

As you spend time with your child you’ll learn where your child is on the developmental ladder and how to move forward. When given the opportune environment, toddlers explore their worlds. You encourage, correct, guide, and teach along the way in order to influence your child along life’s path. Your leadership is important. Some parents believe that a child is like a flower and that just providing water and nutrients will produce a flourishing plant. It’s in the toddler years that you realize that a child is more like a garden where weeds and flowers grow up together. God uses parents to mold the hearts of their kids, and along with God’s grace, they work to remove the weeds, find the strengths, and encourage progress toward a fruitful life.

Every person is born with a sin nature. That means that children have a magnetic pull toward sin. Although the ultimate solution is salvation, your godly influence now will set the stage for your child to understand God’s love, right and wrong, the humility to learn from mistakes, and the confidence to make wise choices. Spiritual development is

interwoven into the daily activities of a young child's life. Foundational truths of trust, love, following instructions, and responding to authority all set the stage for continued growth on a heart level. Your work as a parent is strategic and it doesn't start later. It starts right now.



Am I a Bad Parent if My Baby Can't Read?

As if you didn't have enough on your plate covering outlets, preparing healthy meals, and continually adjusting the sleep schedule, you might be wondering if you're irreparably harming your poor toddler by not having him Harvard-ready by preschool. Between infomercials promising that a baby can read and amazing stories of five-year-old opera stars, parents wonder, "What should I expect from my toddler?" As with most of parenting, the answer lies in knowing your child.

Think twice about universal claims. Is your child like the other kids? Of course not! Unfortunately, in a post-industrial society, that can be hard to remember. When we as adults want to accomplish a task, our primary frame of reference is often the industrial assembly line. Insert raw material, apply the identical process, and the same products spit out. While this works great for making tires or bouncy balls, you can't apply this thinking to children. An error happens when parents start to think their kids are simply raw material to which you apply the approved

process such as a prized preschool, an accelerated reading program, an advanced sports team, and then Harvard here we come. When this doesn't happen, too often parents assume the problem is the process. Instead, the problem may be the frame of reference.

Children are people, not products. People can't be simply molded into a desired outcome. Your child has been knit together by the Master of the Universe for a purpose and a call for which they're "fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139:13-16 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body."

This complexity requires that you discover and nurture your child's uniqueness. No single approach will work for all the children in your family. Just because one child can learn to read by 30 months, don't assume yours can. Conversely, just because most children can't play the piano at 30 months, don't assume your music-loving toddler can't. Instead of following every trend, become an expert on your child's abilities and interests, and then offer the best support for developing those arenas.

Look for ways to build on your child's strengths. While not every baby can read, some can. As you engage your child, you may find pronounced areas of accomplishment. If your child begins to show interest in a subject, nurture it. Give your child a variety of experiences early. Playing with numbers and letters is fine but also consider art, music, and solving problems. Sometimes what some parents

might consider a mess, your child views as an art project or an experience in texture.

Playing with pudding in a high chair shouldn't be misconstrued as disobedience or a lack of manners. It's a learning activity. The child who ponders a dead worm on the ground is taking it all in. Splashing in the bathtub isn't necessarily being mischievous. It's learning how water works as well as how people respond to getting wet. You might want to give yourself and your child a little extra margin for exploration as opportunities present themselves. It's all part of the education process.

One mom reported the following story. "At about 30 months our son routinely started asking me to count as we traveled home from our destination. At some point on the drive, he'd say, "Mommy—count." Not thinking much about it, I'd count until we got home. Depending on when he asked, I could get as high as 600. Numbers intrigued him from the start. By second grade he was doing high school multiplication. Without even realizing what I was doing, I nurtured his interest to encourage his early ability."

To assume that you should count for your young child would not only be useless in developing math skills but it would likely cause you to miss unique strengths. A better approach is to listen to your child. What does she like? Where make her curious? Then focus where your child shows interest. In this you'll discover uniqueness and nurture budding strengths all while building an encouraging relationship, crucial for the future years of parenting.

Keep in mind that most kids won't demonstrate expertise in any particular area of life at a young age. Watch for signs of strength but also look for ways to nurture your child in general. By providing a variety of activities and

situations you'll build a base of experience that your child will build upon.

Talk about life as you go. "Do you hear that sound? It's a fire truck." "Smell this perfume. Isn't that nice?" "Would you like to taste this lemon? It's sour." By walking your toddler through life, you introduce multi-sensory opportunities. Children are learning a tremendous amount in their early years, and your support and encouragement can go a long way to help them develop.

Consider yourself a guide on life's path. Sometimes you'll want to lead and point out interesting things along the trail. Other times you'll want to allow your child to lead and even clear the path a bit so that your toddler can take new steps along the way.

It's fun to watch children learn, discover, and experience life. Enjoy this special time and look for ways to enhance it. In doing so, you'll give your child a love for learning and a greater confidence with life.



Play is a Child's Work

The “work” of toddlerhood is play. Your child uses toys and activities to investigate the world, develop both physical and intellectual skills, and learn how to navigate the complexities of relationships. An understanding of the layers taking place can help you equip your toddler to both enjoy and get more out of play.

Parents sometimes believe that play requires other children, so they arrange play dates to encourage their toddlers to engage with other kids, especially if their toddler is the first child. Unfortunately, however, they often see all their planning go down the drain as the toddlers engage in a battle to the death over the one red truck ten minutes into the play session. With everyone in separate parts of the room, the play date hardly seems fun for anyone.

Toddlers rarely have the developmental capability of playing well with other children. Your toddler's most important relationship is with you. The time for desiring relationships outside the family comes later. Toddlers don't crave or build friendships the way adults do. Your child is more focused on self and connecting with you than others, so don't be surprised if play dates don't work out as hoped.

The development of a child is clearly evident when you put a pile of blocks in the room and send children of various ages to play with them. Typically a two-year-old goes to the blocks and takes what he wants and plays alone or watches others build. Three-year-olds will often play side-by-side each building their own tower, admiring each other but still keeping rather separate. When children are four years old, they often build a tower or building together. There's nothing wrong with children who are younger, they just don't have the cognitive skills yet to fully understand cooperative play.

A couple of toddlers can play together as long as nobody wants the same stuffed animal at the same time. Battles emerge when two or more toddlers need the same item for their individual plans to move forward. Your toddler will care much more about getting the needed bunny than making friends with the child who is currently the obstacle in the way.

Group play does have its benefits, however. Toddlers get ideas from each other of how to use toys or play games. They enjoy watching each other since so few people in their world are their size or use their vocabulary. And although a challenge at times, they begin to develop social play skills as they must wait for a toy someone else is using or offer to trade what they have for what they want from someone else.

Your teaching at this stage helps children move forward developmentally to the next stage. Skills for engaging with others must, and should, be imposed from outside, such as rules regarding hitting, sharing, and saying "please" and "thank you." As you impose these, your toddler gains foundational insights into ways to engage with others. These

habits will develop into real consideration for others as emotions and intellect advance to include other people. So, setting up the play dates for your child can be helpful as long as you remember that you'll likely have to be very involved to provide the coaching necessary. Don't fear that a meltdown or failure to connect with other children means something is wrong. Your toddler is just not to the connection-with-others stage.

Toddlers love to engage with their parents so you'll often hear words such as, "Dad, let's play." In order to enjoy your child at this stage you must remember that your goals for a game are different than your child's. Adults tend to play a game to see who wins or coordinate toys to accomplish a goal. Adult play tends to have a beginning and end. Not so for toddlers.

Toddlers play to explore their world and figure out how things work. They play to exercise control over some aspect of life and bend it to their will. They play with you to gain your undivided attention and invite you into their world. They often learn through imitation or exploration. Toddlers spend much of their day wearing what you choose, eating what you serve, being transported to the destinations on your agenda for your goals. In play, toddlers get to tell you how life works. You follow their rules for what trucks can do. Play offers you a window into their world. You get to experience the randomness they usually encounter while also learning about their priorities. It's usually best to set aside your goal-oriented thinking and let your toddler run the show. You'll enjoy the play more and you'll gain valuable insight into what's going on in your child's head and heart.

One of the greatest gifts you can give to your toddler is

undivided attention. Grant this chief desire and you'll be teaching more than you'd imagine. If you find these times difficult, especially when you have other pressing things to get done, remember that love is best defined as sacrifice and that often means that you give up what you want in order to give others what they want.

1 John 3:16 says it well. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." As you play on your child's terms, you get concrete practice in setting aside your own desires for your child's sake. That practice will carry over to make you more focused on meeting your child where he lives in life's other arenas as well.

Play should be fun. With insights into what is really going on, you can find ways to capitalize on the "work" of toddlerhood by engaging your child in order to get into his heart and mind. You'll learn valuable things and play will provide many opportunities to teach. It won't be long until your toddler is off playing with friends and you'll be begging for some time together. Enjoy play while you have it. It's a gift for both you and your child.



The Value of Your Words

Your words have a powerful impact on your child's heart. What you say and how you say it always communicate multiple messages. For example, if you yell at your child for touching the vase on the coffee table, the message about the vase is certainly clear, but the underlying message from your tone is painful. Be careful about using a raised voice to get your child to do what you want. Yelling is a shortcut and can have lasting damaging results.

One of the ways to guide your use of words is to think about what you want your child to do instead of focusing on what you want your child to stop doing. It's often surprising how often parents focus on what they want their children to stop doing instead of concentrating on what they want their kids to do instead. One mom kept track of her words in the course of her day and marked them as negative, positive, or neutral. She had thought they'd be rather balanced, but after her study she found that she used far more negative comments than positive ones. Just imagine listening to the parent of a toddler. "Stop that," "No," "Don't do that," and "Get away from there," are often heard more than their positive alternatives.

If you try to think in terms of what you want your child

to do instead, you might say, “Play gentle,” “Remember to come when I call you,” “Do the right thing,” or “Try a different way.” When parents focus on positive speech they empower their children to think of solutions instead of simply focusing on problems.

When parents focus on what the child is doing wrong, the first word that comes out of their mouths is usually “don’t” or “no.” It’s actually amazing how many times some parents use those words to guide their child’s behavior on a daily basis. It’s not surprising then that a child’s first word is often “no” since it’s been so commonly used. You can minimize the use of the word “no” by reserving it for times when it’s absolutely necessary.

To keep children from touching items, you might use “hot” or “ouch.” Create your own words for cueing your child regarding different behaviors. Instead of saying “no” when the child starts to do something wrong, say, “You need to obey.” In fact, those words can become a cue for your child that you mean business. You say many things to your child during the day, and the various forms of statements made by parents often confuse young children. After all, parents share ideas, ask questions, and give opinions, but then every once in a while the parent starts getting upset when one of these messages isn’t followed. Kids need to know when a statement you make is required instead of just optional. Using words like, “You need to obey,” helps get the point across.

When affirming and disciplining, use phrases such as “good job” instead of “good boy.” You may think it’s just semantics, but your child often senses the difference. Your toddler needs to remain confident of your support no matter what. Your love isn’t based on performance but on your

relationship together. Correct terminology keeps the focus on disapproval of the actions without causing your toddler to question your love.

Your words are the primary source of your child's speech development and vocabulary. Talk to your child a lot as you move around the house, explaining what you're doing and why. "Mommy is going to get a diaper and get your clothes now and we're going to get you out of those pajamas." Or, "I'm washing dishes. Then I'm going to make us some lunch." A continual narrative about your daily activities teaches your child more than any TV or video could. If you tend to go around quietly and take care of your business, it's time to make a change. Your words provide curriculum for your child's development.

In the same way, guard yourself from talking about your child's weaknesses or mistakes, at least when your toddler can hear. It's interesting that most adults would be careful about what they would say about another adult when that adult can hear, but those same parents don't think twice about saying negative things about their kids in front of others. It's not appropriate and it's not helpful for the child who is taking it all in and developing an opinion of self.

Look for ways to bless your family with words. Proverbs 12:25 says, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up." Notice how emotions in another person are often settled by the words of another. Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Every morning as you open your eyes and before you move, take a moment and pause. Thank God for the chance to live another day in him. Ask God to open your eyes to see the love he has provided for you in this day. Ask him to bathe you in

the assurance of that love. Ask for his wisdom to know his priorities for your day, the energy and insight to accomplish these, and the self-control to say no to everything else. Then, thank him for your spouse and each child by name. Ask him to give you insight into ministering to them this day. You'll be amazed how this habit will change your words as your feet hit the ground and the daily work of parenting begins.



Helping Your Toddler Develop Independence

Many parents wonder just how much they should expect from their toddlers. Are they pushing too hard? Are they expecting enough? A prime goal for the toddler stage is promoting your child's ability to accomplish achievable tasks and make appropriate choices. But, what's "achievable" and when are choices "appropriate"?

During the toddler years, you're equipping your child to become more independent, one of the important heart qualities needed for years to come. Several suggestions can guide you to success in this endeavor. It's also important to realize that by working in this area in particular, you'll be making the parenting shift from parenting an infant to parenting a toddler.

During the toddler stage your child desperately wants to be in control and exert her own will. At the same time, she often fears her growing control might cost relationship with you. Till now, in her eyes, your relationship has been based on you filling her needs, feeding her, dressing her, and transporting her from here to there and back here

again. Now that she's feeding, dressing, and transporting herself, will you still have a relationship? She may fear all her new power means losing you, especially if a new baby serves as a reminder of the closeness of infancy.

Refuse to disappear. Instead of seeing the newfound skills as an excuse for you to diminish your focus on your toddler, choose to remain engaged and to connect in new ways. Though you'll still do much for your child, you'll now move to doing some tasks alongside or with your toddler. Instead of Mom feeding her daughter, Mom has lunch with her little girl. Dad moves from carrying his son to the car to racing him to get there. Through these transitions, toddlers begin to see that a relationship is based on much more than simply doing things for each other.

Give your toddler tasks to accomplish. This not only fosters independence but also gives you more opportunities to guide thinking, train, and teach. Achievable toddler tasks are short, focused, and rely primarily on gross motor coordination. These "jobs" allow your child to use emerging skill sets to accomplish real results, a huge confidence builder. As you encourage your toddler to get dressed, eat, put toys in the tub, and pour the dog's food into a bowl, muscles and brain must work together to accomplish the goals.

Of course, the learning process can be messy. Tiny hands, evolving muscle control, and a long learning curve all serve to make this a process rather than an event. But, in the process, kids also learn how to handle failure, frustration, and mistakes. When your little one drops the cup of milk your response is very important. If you react in anger or even shock then your toddler feels the emotion. It's better to remain calm, say, "Oops. Now we have a mess to

clean up,” and pass the paper towels to your child to start the process. Mistakes are a part of life and how you handle them now teaches valuable lessons for later.

Look for ways to equip your child to be successful. Buy spoons with thick handles, clothes that pull on or have easy buttons, and toy tubs or open shelves instead of deep toy boxes. Put messier food such as cereal, yogurt, and saucy foods in mugs rather than bowls because the high sides enable toddlers to spoon food more easily. Resign yourself to seeing toys haphazardly placed and dog food on the floor. As you provide opportunities for your child to achieve, you feed a basic toddler developmental need—to begin taking control of the environment and manage it for the good.

During the toddler years you can expect your child to do a number of tasks with differing levels of accomplishment. A little frustration is a good motivator. Too much can be discouraging, so you'll want to be available to help but not too quick to step in. Practice in common areas such as dressing, eating, and putting away toys. Young children can also obey simple commands, and help do common chores along with you such as making the bed, getting clothes out of the dryer, emptying the dishwasher, and cleaning off the table. Look for age-appropriate tasks such as putting clothes in the hamper, sorting recyclables, and throwing trash away.

In short, you can give your toddler any task that relies primarily on gross motor coordination with a bit of fine motor thrown in. Tasks that may wait for the next stage may include things such as brushing teeth, combing hair, or fastening difficult snaps or buttons because those tasks require developed fine motor control or multiple steps.

If your child balks or becomes easily frustrated, spend

some time teaching how to accomplish the task. You might put your hand on his to guide the spoon or to pull on the pants. Help your child experience small successes in order to give impetus to try larger ones. As you work with your child, you'll discern when it's best to step in or back away. Both are important. The best way to know what your child can do is often revealed in the daily interaction. Even though the tasks may take longer, pass them on to your child. Learning is taking place even though you may get out the door much later than you'd like.

As you encourage your toddler to attempt achievable objectives, you feed your toddler's inherent desire to accomplish goals and put skills to work. Furthermore, as your toddler routinely takes on assignments, you not only build a skill-set, you make helping around the house a normal expectation. This pays huge dividends as your child gets older both for a sense of purpose and for your workload.

As your child develops greater independence you're laying the groundwork for the foundational truth that God provides work as therapy in life. God created Adam and then put him into the Garden of Eden to work and care for it. Many see work as a curse. Yet, before there was sin, there was work. God intends work to be a blessing, an opportunity to learn, grow, serve, and add to the lives of others. Work also encourages individuals to discover new layers of abilities and talents previously undeveloped. It all starts in toddlerhood as you teach your child the work of living life in a family. You'll help open your child's eyes to all the ways to use energy and abilities to serve others including the Lord.

Proverbs 12:24 reveals one of the secrets to leadership. "Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor."

Whether your child will eventually be a leader or not is up to the Lord. However, you can provide the ability to work hard, solve problems, and overcome frustration now, a valuable gift that will be used for the rest of your child's life.



The Value of Routine

Sally couldn't understand why her very contented baby turned so fussy as a toddler. Not quite sure what to do with a two-year-old, Sally tried to remedy the situation by keeping her daughter Gina occupied with activities. They took trips to the park, to friends, to the zoo, and to the store. That seemed to work some of the time, but her toddler still seemed to be quite fussy. What Sally needed wasn't more distraction for her daughter, but more routine to help create an internal sense of order inside her daughter's life. Entertainment and activity may be a good break at times, but the structure of routine is most helpful for giving toddlers security about their days.

Because others dictate so much of their lives, a day tends to feel like a whirlwind. One minute they're eating, the next someone is putting clothes on them, and the next they are whisked in and out of the car. They don't know why they're in a store, at a stranger's house, or walking down the hall to a room where people are singing. Adults just move them at will. The frenzy can be unsettling. Routine helps to provide a sense of security.

When days and nights have some common elements

then children gain a sense of comfort, knowing that breakfast always follows getting dressed, or that bedtime follows a bath, a song, and a prayer. As your child gains the ability to predict what will come next, the anticipation of next events becomes helpful for internal peace. That's not to suggest that children like what's coming next. Some children resist the after-dinner bath and don't want their faces washed after eating, but the routine is still good and even helps them accept the things that they might not prefer.

Don't become too rigid in your routine, however. Remember, your toddler can't tell time, and staying on a schedule isn't as important as the predictable cues that mark the day. Furthermore, children have various needs that require adjustments to a schedule. For example, your toddler may need an early nap due to a cold. Or, if you and your toddler are thoroughly enjoying some time looking at books, you might delay that nap another thirty minutes. You don't have to schedule every second or create carbon copy days. Just know that having a general flow that provides the skeleton for each day meets your toddler's need for routine.

In addition to schedule routines, also look for ways to develop relational routines. When your son asks for a cup, require a please, and when you give it encourage a thank you. That's just one example of a routine that teaches children a sense of order in the way people relate to each other.

Routine also aids you as you begin to teach new disciplines. Say you want your toddler to pick up her toys before you take her to the babysitter for your afternoon job. If playtime is always followed by clean-up time, then children develop that tendency in their hearts.

In a typical preschool when children want to play with a game, then they first get a mat, then pull out the game.

When it's time to move to another activity, then the child is expected to put away the game and the mat before moving on. In a well-run preschool you see children moving from one activity to another on their own with very few reminders to clean up. It's their routine. You can begin to establish similar patterns at home to encourage children to clean up after themselves and learn to put things back when they're done. Of course, this requires quite a bit of patience because most toddlers are eager to go to the next thing or are easily distracted, but your gentle guidance teaches important lessons that even two-year-olds can learn. You make it easy for your toddler to obey because of routine.

Schedule routines help toddlers act more independently. For example, you may create segments of time where you have one-on-one interaction with your toddler and other times when your toddler must play alone. The benefit of a routine is that your toddler knows that the alone times are coming and gets used to them. This allows you to focus on other tasks.

Focus your routine on a balance of activity that helps meet the needs of your growing toddler. That means spending some time working on large muscle development (playing outside with a ball, taking walks, or rolling across the floor), fine motor skills (playing with clay, drawing squiggles with crayons, and folding paper), intellectual skills (reading, singing songs, and talking with each other), and free play to encourage creativity (including time for her to play alone).

If you need ideas for how to spend time together, ask a local preschool for their daily schedule and pull the agenda items that work for you. While your routine may be enhanced by group reading time at the local library or

a morning at a church activity or a fun trip to the zoo, having the same general flow for most days helps both you and your child feel more in control and therefore better able to engage with life.

Like many moms Sally thought the answer was to pacify her toddler with busyness and entertainment; after all, that's what excited her. What her toddler needed most was a predictable pattern where she could assert her preferences and calmly look forward to the next known part of the day. With the security and comfort of routine, most fussiness gives way to active engagement and relationship building between parent and toddler.

Toddlers are in that very important developmental stage where they're learning that the world contains more than just them. In infancy, the baby often determines the eating and sleep schedule, but toddlers are learning how to fit in with others. Routines help young children grasp in practical terms that they must adjust to others. When parents use an entertainment model to keep their toddlers happy, then it's harder for the young child to make the necessary developmental changes.

As you continue to develop routine in your family, don't forget to plan spiritual disciplines into your day. Psalm 92:1-2 says, "It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night." That's good advice. If you spend time focused on God's love in the morning each day, then your personal challenges will go much smoother. And in the evening, when it's all done, it's great to reflect on God's faithfulness. That kind of routine can go a long way to keep you spiritually energized, an important part of your life that will enhance your parenting.



Obedience is Learned by Following Instructions

When you discovered you were going to be a parent, what excited you most about growing up with your little one? Was it playing games, teaching football, enjoying tea parties, or cheering at high school graduation? Whatever excited you, chances are it wasn't the notion of becoming a cop.

Many parents consider limit setting much like being a police officer. It reduces parenting to hunting down bad behavior, spoiling fun, and being the bad guy. Others fear the very notion of being "an authority," equating it with becoming old and out-of-touch. They vastly prefer the role of a friend, assuming that positive reinforcement and benign neglect will somehow make room for their kids to mature naturally. Many parents consider toddler misbehavior to be cute, harmless, or so entrenched that they determine to wait until the child is older "when disciplining will be easier."

Disciplining is about disciplining your child. You teach and model God's ways of living as you go through life ev-

ery day. The goal is to create a relationship that mirrors the one you pray they'll eventually have with God, where obedience is the natural response to his loving authority. Learning obedience in family life is God's idea. Ephesians 6:1 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Teaching it is part of your job description and you, as a parent, must teach them what it means in practical terms. You don't have to be mean, but you do often have to be firm.

In order for children to learn obedience they often need correction. Proverbs 6:23 says, "The corrections of discipline are the way to life." Simply put, there are several benefits to correction and your attitude needs to reflect that. You don't have to view correction as an interruption to your life but simply another step in the process as you're training your child to do what's right.

God has hidden a number of success skills inside the obedience training process, so use life to practice teaching your child to respond to your instructions. When kids learn to obey, they learn how to give up their agenda, follow someone else's lead, cooperate, and remove some of the selfishness required for maturity.

At the toddler stage, you set the standard of when and how your child will comply. Obedience is not optional. If you tell your child to come to you for a diaper change, then she must come. If she doesn't start coming right away, you have several options. Not all children are the same, so the route you take to teach obedience may differ based on the child's uniqueness. The important thing to remember, however, is that learning obedience is not optional.

For example, if your daughter doesn't come right away when you call her name, you might repeat the directive and encourage her to come to you. If she doesn't comply,

you might go get her and bring her to where you were. No huge scene, just a simple, firm requirement that she do what you specifically told her to do. While you walk, reinforce your actions by saying, “Jamie, you must come when I call you.”

Some parents move too quickly to some kind of consequence when simply practicing doing what's right is much more effective. In fact, in order to teach a child to come when called, you'll likely want to practice many, many times a day.

It's important for you to develop good patterns of giving instructions. After all, it's a two-way street. Kids need to learn how to follow instructions and parents need to learn how to give them. Many parents communicate an instruction by raising their voice or becoming more intense. That's the cue that you mean business. But it doesn't have to be that way. Firmness doesn't require harshness, but it does require that you take action if your child isn't responding right away.

Some parents make the mistake of allowing children to lead and they follow. If you do, you run the risk of normalizing disobedience and developing poor habits. Regularly requiring your child to do what you ask creates a culture of responsiveness. Furthermore, some parents bribe their kids to do what's right or try to talk them into right behavior. Although those techniques may be helpful at times, relying on them regularly encourages the selfishness in a child who learns to ask the question, “What's in it for me?” or “What are you going to give me if I obey you?”

One of the tasks of the toddler years is to teach your child how to respond to instructions. First, ensure your child understands the words you're using. Before you di-

rect your daughter to put the toys in the bins, spend a few weeks saying, "Let's clean up the toys." Then, hand her a toy and show her how to put it in the box. Once you're sure she knows what the words "clean up the toys" mean, then you can direct her to put her toys away by saying something like, "Jamie, you need to clean up the toys now."

She should begin to put the toys away as soon as you give the instruction. If she refuses, begins to whine, or runs, take her by the hand and, with your hand over hers, pick up every toy and put it away. Though she may resist, very calmly keep your hand on hers until the toys are done. Then say, "Jamie, you must obey. When I tell you to put your toys away, put them in the box." Teaching ensures she knows how to obey and prevents suffering an unfair consequence or confusion.

Make your instructions sound different than suggestions or ideas. It's not wrong to make suggestions or share ideas but your child needs to know when you mean business. Cue words help immensely. Simply using the phrase "Jamie, you need to pick up the blocks now" can be the cue that this is an obedience situation rather than a negotiable one.

Be sure to encourage your child for growth in this area. Never forget that your child is fighting selfish tendencies in order to comply with your directions. As you encourage with praise your child will be inspired to keep going. Just as God pours blessing on obedient children, you imitate him when you bless your children with affirmation for obedience. Furthermore, you're strengthening the heart for your child's future by building tendencies that will last a lifetime.



It's All About Control

A shriek brought Glen and Robin running to their infant daughter's bedroom. Their anxiety quickly turned to relief—and a tinge of humor. Casey was born with an abundance of hair, and, by six months, it was several inches long. Thus, when her flailing hand instinctively grasped whatever it contacted, she grabbed a handful of her own hair. As they opened her hand to free her from her unknown torturer, her sobs subsided.

By the time Casey was fifteen months old, the shrieks were coming from her older brother Juan. She could now intentionally grab objects, and Juan's hair was the favorite target. Whether to get Juan's attention, to keep up as he walked away, or to punish him for not handing over a toy, she learned that pulling hair could accomplish the goal. Casey had reached the control years.

Toddlers are consumed with how their bodies work. They climb stairs, pull pots out of cabinets, and examine anatomy in the bathtub. Fingers grasp everything including food, toys, electrical outlets, and brother's hair. They haphazardly pull on clothes and deftly remove them whenever feeling a need for the breeze. In all this toddlers seek control.

A child's quest for control, although irritating at times, is healthy and makes it possible to move from diapers to potties. They move from you changing their clothes and feeding them to dressing and feeding themselves. They move from being entertained to entertaining themselves. However, it also means they may remove their shoes at the most inopportune moments or fight to the death over which outfit to wear. They may eat their food or spew it. They may play nicely with toys or throw them. As they get older, toddlers may use their voices to ask politely or whine to get their way. They may learn to control their tempers in order to get along with family and friends or they might throw a fit to demand attention.

It's that sense of control that drives children forward to explore their worlds and test out everything from that new shiny shoe on the floor to how a toilet flushes. Exploration is healthy and important for the development of intelligence and for providing a broad base of experience. It's now, during the toddler years, that children also begin to learn another important life lesson, how others limit their control.

Thus, part of the parenting goal for toddlers is taking their consuming desire to control everything and applying it to controlling themselves. Just as children at this stage are physically wired to restrain their body so that they can eat, dress, and use a potty, they're emotionally and intellectually wired to learn to restrain their behavior in compliance with your limits. This is critical because it teaches them how to live within structure and to rightly respond to all the authorities that will come into their lives.

One mom said, "I wish my daughter would just do what I say. She seems to always want to move in a different di-

rection, play with a different toy, eat a different food, or run away from me at the first opportunity.” This mom is experiencing one of the challenges of working with toddlers. Knowing when to emphasize conformity and when to encourage independence is very important at this age.

Why teach restraint? For many parents the words “obedience” and “authority” conjure images of a dictator imposing his will on a vulnerable child. No loving parent desires this role. However, children need to learn an important heart quality that we call responsiveness to authority. Colossians 3:20 says, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” It’s the parent’s job to teach obedience. It’s not optional. It’s a required course. Toddlers can start to learn appropriate boundaries while you still encourage them to explore within those limits.

You don’t need to teach your children to disobey or demand their own way. Just try to keep a toddler from pushing the buttons on the television or pulling a sibling’s hair, and you’ll witness one of the strongest forces in nature—the will of a toddler. Self-will doesn’t need to be taught; self-control does. And, it’s a skill our children will need for the rest of their lives.

People live within structure. Schools, sports teams, employers, subdivisions, and legal systems create structures to help individuals come together for the success of the group. To successfully participate, people must subordinate selfish desires to the rules that govern the whole. Moreover, you’re training your children to answer to a higher authority—God himself. Children learn to answer to other authorities by first learning to answer to parents. If they have never experienced subordinating their will to a concrete “you” standing right in front of them, then they’ll

have no idea how to submit to the more abstract will of an employer, a legal system, or God.

The toddler years are designed by God to help children learn to explore their worlds and to learn limits on that exploration. They learn to control themselves and how sometimes that control is limited by boundaries provided by the parent. The heart of a toddler needs to learn to live within boundaries but also needs the freedom to explore in order to develop confidence. Children grow best in this area when they're given significant room to explore surrounded by firm boundaries that impose limits.

The word instruction comes from two words "in" and "structure" and means "to put structure into." Early months of your child's life encouraged freedom and exploration with little structure imposed. During the toddler months it's time to add some structure but not so much that your child loses the desire to explore. Both goals, responsiveness to authority and confidence to explore, are important at this stage and you have the privilege of encouraging them.



Choices Decrease Tension and Increase Learning

Sasha finally started dressing herself, making Laura's mornings easier. The problem? Sasha chose the same purple shirt every morning. Desperate to wash away the milk and toothpaste stains, Laura finally insisted on a different shirt. As usual, battle ensued.

Fights over things like clothing, meals, games, or bath time often get in the way of forward progress in family life. Instead of your toddler spending energy on completing the task or you spending energy teaching the task, everyone's energy goes toward winning the battle. One of the ways to circumvent this problem with toddlers is to give them options. Although sometimes children must learn to comply with a request, giving choices is another parenting tool that you will want to add to your toolbox. Offering choices can provide the child with a sense of control while still moving things in a positive direction.

First, choose your battles. Discern core values and the behaviors these values require. If you believe that your child needs to wear a nicer shirt to church instead of the

play shirt she's used to, then prepare to firmly enforce the dress code. Clothing options then would only include presentable choices. If you aren't committed to this value, don't set the rule. You don't want to tell your toddler she must wear a nicer shirt and then, because she's throws the mother of all temper tantrums, give in to the play shirt. You undercut your authority by setting rules then breaking them, convincing her to battle you every time you set a rule. Conversely, you don't want to find yourself fighting battles over rules that, on reflection, don't really matter to you.

Once you have identified core values, select the options that fit your rules. Make these options available to your child. Let her choose. This gives your toddler some control while ensuring that her growing independence remains within needed boundaries. If wearing clean clothes is a value, offer, "Your purple shirt is dirty. You can pick from the red shirt or the yellow shirt." If you value good nutrition, offer appropriate fruits and veggies and let your toddler select the menu. To promote sharing, inform toddlers who are fighting over the same toy that they can choose to take turns with the toy or choose to put it away.

When God worked through his leader Joshua, choices were made clear to the people. In Joshua 24:15 he said to them, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." God made it clear that serving him was a choice, helping people recognize the importance of their decision.

Giving a child a choice teaches problem-solving skills. When a child has to evaluate the benefits of two options, he

enters into an intelligence-building process. Even before children can articulate what's actually going on, they're evaluating advantages and disadvantages, and likes and dislikes. This process of decision-making is important training that children will use for years in the future.

With all these situations, stand ready to make and enforce the choice if your child refuses to cooperate. This teaches your child that, while she has the opportunity to influence the situation, she cannot use choices to break the rules. If you have decided the purple shirt is too dirty to wear, give her the chance to pick a better shirt. If she refuses, holding out for the purple one, put the red shirt on her. Or, if the situation allows, tell her she must stay in her room until she's ready to get dressed in one of the clean shirts. Then, leave the room. Though you may face a battle this time, if you require that she make her choices within the options you set, she learns to take advantage of the choices available while operating within your parameters.

Choices make even unpleasant situations more palatable for your child. If your toddler fusses over going to bed, offer, "You can have the nightlight on or off. Which do you prefer?" This sense of some control over the situation helps your toddler cooperate with your instruction to stay in bed. This approach won't cure every fight, but you may be surprised how often a choice defuses a pending tantrum. As you offer choices, you provide both a positive outlet for your toddler to exercise free will and guidance on how to cooperate with you and live out core values.

One Dad said, "We were having a struggle at bedtime, but then we started offering a choice. We would ask our son, 'Do you want Mom to put you to bed or Dad to put you to bed?' There was no option about going to bed, just

who would help in the process. We were surprised at how that simple approach often defused what would otherwise have been difficult. We don't always give choices. Sometime we just say no or require that our son obey, but when it seems wise, we offer a choice and things often seem to move along better."

Offering your toddler choices likewise benefits parents. You gain insight into how your child's mind works. You discover what your toddler values by the choices made. Even more importantly, as your child's ability to think out loud progresses, you'll learn how she reasons through options. In these insights parents often gain nuggets of wisdom and inspiration available only from the mind of a child.

Battles of the will are one of the most predictable and difficult aspects of raising a toddler. Yet, as you offer a positive outlet for your toddler to exercise the growing desire to influence the environment through choices, you reduce the number of battles and educate your child about how to use growing abilities within healthy boundaries.



Yelling is Not the Solution

Parents often resort to yelling to get things done. It's one thing to yell when your child is in danger, stepping off the curb into a busy street. In that moment your yelling communicates danger. But the general intensity some parents use to maneuver through their day is dangerous, communicating a continual sense of alarm and unnecessary if parents have alternative parenting strategies in their toolbox.

The problem is that anger works. If you want to get your toddler to be quiet, yelling will often do the trick. If you want your child to get in the car, a raised voice can get the job done. For example, despite your patient reminders and your well-intentioned encouragement, the floor remains littered with toys. So, you yell, and it gets the floor cleaned up. Your toddler picks up the toys.

Unfortunately, a dangerous lesson is learned on both sides. Children learn, "I don't have to comply until my parents yell." Parents learn, "The only effective strategy is to yell." This becomes a self-fulfilling cycle where your toddler may wait until you raise your voice, so you end up yelling more often. You may get results in the moment, but

this cycle doesn't teach your children to do what's right because it's the right thing to do. Rather it teaches your child to do something in order to become a people-pleaser and avoid the next eruption of the mom volcano.

First, is yelling all that bad? The short answer is "Yes." Typically, parents yell because their children repeatedly fail to comply with the desired behavior. Parents either want them to stop doing something such as stop making a mess that requires significant work to clean up, or follow an instruction such as put your toys in the container. Either way moms and dads tell children to do things that kids often don't want to do. One of the ingredients that makes compliance work is self-control. When parents yell, they exhibit the very lack of self-control they're asking their children to exercise.

When parents yell three things happen. First, the child often interprets the intense tone of voice to contain a message that he's unworthy, unacceptable, and unloved. Certainly that isn't your intention but the harsh tone often sends that message.

Secondly, distance develops in the relationship. The lingering tension makes it difficult for closeness to develop, and closeness is essential for passing on values and convictions to children. When parents yell at their kids they chip away at the very foundation of the relationship.

The third harmful effect of yelling is that the parent feels guilty. Yes, yelling is not helpful. The parent instinctively knows that so the parent develops a negative attitude about the child, about parenting, and even about life.

Parents often use yelling to motivate their kids because it works. Yet the high price tag paid isn't worth it. The negative results of yelling at kids illustrate what God says in

James 1:20, “for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” Parents need a better plan.

Given that yelling isn’t effective, how does one stop the pattern? First, you must purpose in your heart to change. After all, you regularly ask your kids to change. Here’s a good opportunity to model doing the right thing even when it’s hard or inconvenient. Your children learn much about forcing themselves to do something they don’t want to do from watching you take a gut-level impulse and resist it. Your toddler knows you want to yell, sometimes even pushing the “yell button” knowing you’ll lose it. When you resist the impulse to yell, you offer a visible example of how to exercise restraint. Furthermore, remaining in control of yourself often results in greater control of the situation you’re trying to change.

Yelling is often an indicator that the parent doesn’t have an adequate plan. If the child needs correction, you need a strategy. If your child isn’t following instructions you may need to practice giving and following instructions for a while. If your child has a meltdown, you need ideas for anger management for your child and likely for yourself in that situation. A good plan can go a long way to target frustration in a helpful direction.

Some parents think that there are two choices: yell or give a consequence. No wonder they are frustrated. Since consequences easily wear out, parents have often taken away everything or done everything possible to their kids without seeing change so they go back to yelling. The reality is that there are hundreds of ways to help children change their ways. The goal is heart change. Although consequences may work, they certainly aren’t the only way to change behavior. New patterns need to develop in your

child. Patterns are tendencies that a child has. Tendencies come from the heart and often require a multi-faceted approach to change.

If you tell your daughter to pick up her toys, she should begin picking them up right away. If she doesn't, physically put your hands over hers and pick up every toy. Without yelling, you have communicated that she has a chance to obey you on her own. If she doesn't, you'll get her to pick up the toys your way.

This book is designed to give you practical advice that you can turn into alternatives to yelling. With practice you'll see significant changes in the patterns of relating between you and your child. The alternative to yelling always requires more practice and more work. Yelling is a shortcut. As you rehearse new routines with your child good things happen. You'll discover new strategies as a parent. Your child will learn to respond to different cues besides yelling and your relationship will improve.

Sometimes parents have to change the way they think about their role as a parent. Some parents believe that if they're just pleasant and encouraging then positive response is the expected result. Nice as it seems, rarely does encouragement alone achieve desired behavior—especially behavior contrary to your child's desires. While they love hearing us say, "Great job!" when they pick up their toys, it's really character that gives kids the inner strength to stop their activity and do the hard work of cleaning up. Firmness teaches character. But don't confuse firmness with harshness. Yelling is harsh but firmness simply requires that the action be done or some other parental action will take place. That action with a toddler may simply be forcing the required behavior.

When you calmly force your toddler to do the right thing, your child will not only learn to comply with the immediate expectation, but will also develop the skill of behaving rightly because it's right, not just to stop the yelling. Eventually, you get to the point where you simply give the instruction and the child willingly complies. No yelling is needed. That takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Words like "practice" and "training" are good ways for parents to think about discipline. You're the coach. No need to yell, but you do need to be firm and engage in a lot of practice sessions.



How to Develop Patience... In You

Some parents seem to face life with a wellspring of patience that covers every interaction with their children. The rest of us have those moments when we pray, “Lord, give me patience . . . and give it to me now!”

At the same time we fear praying for patience, knowing that God then brings into our lives the most trying circumstances so that we have plenty of opportunity to practice patience. Parents of toddlers don’t need to worry about this. God knows that anyone living with a toddler has ample opportunity to practice patience. Yet, often the practice just doesn’t seem to pay off. Though we desperately want to be patient, it sometimes seems to be an elusive quality. Are some people simply born more patient, or is there a way for all of us to grow in this trait? The answer is yes. It is true that some people are naturally more patient but it’s also true that it’s part of godliness and God wants to grow us all in this valuable quality.

First of all, attend to yourself. Children tend to misbehave when they’re hungry, tired, or out of their routine.

It turns out, so do parents. We tend to be impatient when hungry, tired, or out of our routine. Thus, a path to patience may involve examining your own habits.

Are you getting the sleep you need each night? Okay, once the laughing stops, we'll continue. As parents of toddlers (and perhaps another infant), your sleep may be confined to those precious moments between cries from your toddler's bedroom and as you pause at a red light. While sleep deprivation is common among parents of youngsters, it still leads to tiredness and impatience. Whether you find ways to nap, take turns with your spouse to get a full night's sleep, or go to bed earlier, realize your body needs sleep. If you routinely miss out, patience will suffer.

Likewise, busy parents tend to skip meals or eat on the go. Many forgo breakfast. Others load up on caffeine to counter the lack of sleep. Poor eating habits lead to sugar and hormonal imbalances that trigger angry reactions to normal circumstances—not a recipe for patient responses. Your body needs ongoing, nutritious meals to maintain a healthy balance of sugar levels, hormones, and simple fuel for the daily demands of life. If you ignore your own nutritional needs, your physical deprivation may starve your patience level as well.

Finally, while it's true that your children need routine, keep in mind that parents benefit from routines too. When job demands escalate, volunteer roles peak, relatives visit, or schedules change, your adjustment to the lack of routine may take a toll on your patience level. When you can establish routine, you help both your family and yourself. When circumstances are beyond your control, you need to at least be aware of the fact that circumstances may be

lowering your threshold for patience.

Simply being aware of the causes of a sense of impatience can help you be more patient. When you start to react to something your toddler does, you can pause and ask, “How many cups of coffee did I drink this morning?” If you’re counting by the pot instead of the cup, you might wonder if that caffeine level may be having an effect. This knowledge alone may enable you to take a deep breath, realize it’s not your toddler’s behavior at issue, and help you make adjustments accordingly.

Another important tip for achieving patience is to listen to your toddler. So often impatience stems from looking at a situation from an adult perspective. When your toddler’s behavior fails to meet a standard that seems obvious, you might react impatiently. If you can stop and simply imagine what your toddler might have been thinking, not an easy task at times, then that insight often enables patience.

Mark had experienced a series of difficult moments with Alice throughout the day. He paused to catch up on emails, when a foreboding feeling caused him to search for his daughter. After several moments he found her in the garage pouring water on the kittens. Mark took the kitten from Alice’s hands and between clenched teeth asked, “Alice, what are you doing?”

“I’m giving them a bath.”

Mark knelt down beside Alice and took the safe but wet kittens into his lap. As he dried them with a nearby towel, he patiently explained that kittens don’t really like baths the way people do, but it was very sweet of Alice to take such good care of them. He then asked her to come get him the next time she was going to take care of the kittens because he’d like to do that with her. Just listening to Al-

ice's perspective gave Mark not only the ability to patiently respond, but a deep appreciation for the loving heart that beat within his daughter.

When all else fails, recite the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Some people tout counting to ten before responding to circumstances that try your patience. A better tactic may be to recite the nine parts of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" from Galatians 5:22-23. As you say these traits, remind yourself of the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. After all, these are spiritual qualities and God gives them to you as a benefit of your relationship with him. Often spiritual resources fill in the gaps when our human resources are inadequate to meet the challenges. Furthermore, simply going through the list becomes a prayer to God to show these qualities through you—a prayer he loves to answer.

Parents often long for patience. As you root out the causes of impatience, gain insight into your toddler's perspective, and learn to rely on God's divine strength, you'll find that your patience will grow. It's all part of becoming more like the person God desires you to be. It takes time, God's grace, and a willing heart.



Bribes Work, But Are They Okay?

Bethany's first trip to the dentist was horrible. An injured baby tooth required dental intervention. Yet the chair, the instruments, and the lady in the white coat and mask proved overwhelming. Although Mom read books beforehand that explained what would happen and Bethany watched the hygienist clean her siblings' teeth, no cajoling, reasoning, or firm demand could get her to sit in that chair. Mom even offered to allow Bethany to sit on her lap during the procedure. Nothing seemed to work.

Desperate, Mom took her into the hall and calmly said, "Bethany, after the dentist I'm going to take everyone who cooperates to McDonald's. If you sit in the chair and let the dentist check your tooth, you'll get to go. If you don't, I'll drop you off with Daddy before taking the others. What do you choose?"

Mom held her breath as the moments crept by. "Can I still sit in your lap?"

"Yes, of course, honey."

Ten minutes later, with tooth checked and treated, everyone rejoiced as their big smiles headed out to get happy meals.

Incentives can be a powerful tool in the parenting repertoire. They can also backfire horribly. Start by distinguishing between bribery and blessing. Blessings are the natural by-products of obedience. Bribery attempts to induce obedience with externals that may not stimulate internal motivation. Thus, blessing should be a routine aspect of the obedience arena while external motivation should be limited.

Throughout scripture, God promises blessing for following his commands. He brings to focus the eternal, expansive rewards of living life his way by revealing that there are natural, concrete, and immediate benefits for doing so. Psalm 1:3 talks about the blessing that comes to the person who obeys God's ways. "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." In response to the faith of his followers, Jesus promised not only a relationship with him but gave healing (Bartimaeus in Mark 10:52) and restoration of honor (Zacchaeus, Luke 19:8-9). In each case the benefit was a secondary blessing. It was external while the primary blessing was internal. Wise parents routinely bless their children for obedience through encouraging words, time spent on children's interests, and out-of-the ordinary recognitions. However, when using an external motivation such as giving a star on a chart or a payment for an extra job around the house, be sure to emphasize the internal blessing with an affirmation that your child is growing up or demonstrating maturity. Those are the greatest motivations for a child to do well.

It's important to note that even with all the blessings that God offered, the history of God's people shows that blessing alone doesn't ensure obedience. The people of Is-

rael enjoyed great blessing from God, yet the majority fell away generation after generation. Their history has been repeated by Christians over the ages. Those who remained faithful did so because of their relationship with God. To this day the faithful remain obedient out of love for and knowledge of God and because a relationship with him matters more than anything else. In the same way, obedient children become obedient largely out of the richness of relationship with their parents. Blessing can be part of the process but can never replace this relationship.

Properly used, rewards help overcome unusually overwhelming challenges. To make it work, you might use the incentive to surprise your child. “Really? I can get a trip to McDonald’s just for sitting in the dentist chair?” In this case, the reward was unusual and out of the ordinary, something the child thoroughly enjoyed but rarely received. You might want to keep track of events that are particularly appreciated or objects that your child enjoys and file that knowledge for use at strategic moments.

Use external motivation as a secondary benefit. You want your children to learn that they do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do, not just to get a piece of candy. The parent who bribes the child to come to the table, get dressed, get in the car, sit nicely, and so on, runs the risk of raising a child who asks the question, “What am I going to get if I obey?” Most of the time children need to do what’s right without a reward so that they learn to do the right thing just because it’s the right thing to do.

In fact, those parents who continually use rewards to accomplish simple tasks during the day contribute to selfish tendencies. Their continual message to their kids is “I’ll give you what you want if you do what I say.” Be careful.

That approach will backfire in the end.

Use incentives sparingly, primarily to start something new or get over a hump. The unexpected offer of a treat can capture a child's attention and provide the impetus to get over the otherwise insurmountable obstacle. Rewards overdone destroy true obedience. Rather than responding to your authority, your child learns to weigh the relative advantage of taking the bribe or doing what they desire. Obedience isn't something you buy from children. In fact, at a young age children need to learn to practice responsiveness to authority and the importance of doing the right thing simply because that's what we do.

You'll use both internal and external forms of motivation with your kids over the years. Now's a good time to set good patterns in order to move children forward with motivation from the heart, not simply to change their behavior. You don't have to avoid incentives; just be strategic in offering them. Use external motivation to build internal motivation and your rewards will actually increase a child's ability to do what's right.



Little Behavior Problems Can Grow Quickly

Parents sometimes think their kids are cute when they first act out or demonstrate some kind of negative behavior. The baby's smack to your face, the running away when called, or the bad word said with a toddler accent may seem cute at first. The surprise or humor that accompanied the first appearance of this kind of behavior can dull a parent's sense that a response is needed. Sometimes parents say to themselves, "It's such a little thing. Just let it go."

In Song of Solomon, the author advises, "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom." (Song of Solomon 2:15) In Solomon's day many farmers made a huge mistake. Compared to drought, weeds, and ravaging insects, foxes seem so tiny a threat that their presence in the vineyard was easily ignored. Bigger issues required attention and energy. "Just let the foxes have their way. They can't harm much." Given such an opportunity, foxes destroyed the vineyard. This same analogy warns parents to pay attention to the

little habits, traits, and behaviors that seem too small to cause worry. Unchecked they become destroyers, as many parents have discovered much later than they'd like.

Don't ignore small problems that have the potential to grow into more significant ones. Furthermore, be careful of the mixed messages given to children. If you laugh sometimes at their actions and are firm other times, it's not clear to the child what's funny and what's unacceptable. If you repeatedly run after the child who runs away when you call, laughing on the way, it may appear like a game of chase. Then you have a problem and must try to make corrections. What you used to find entertaining now brings displeasure. Your child, rather than responding to your correction, may engage in the behavior all the more to get back to the laughter and affirmation first experienced.

If you made the all-too-common mistake of unintentionally rewarding such misbehavior with any kind of positive response, you now need to make clear that such misbehavior is not tolerated. You can specifically say to your child, "I'm sorry I laughed when you ran away before. I should not have done that. The rule is that when I call you must come. If you don't, you're doing the wrong thing."

As new behaviors arise that at first cause you to laugh but which you know would make horrible habits, you can say, "Honey, that's funny but wrong. We don't allow that." You're teaching an important concept that not everything that brings a laugh is allowed.

Once you've said you won't allow the behavior anymore, be sure to back it up. Establish a consequence for the behavior and impose it every time. Allow no leeway. You're working against your child's impression that the an-

tics have been allowed in the past and therefore will be allowed again. If your toddler doesn't like what you say and hits you, that action can become a tendency. Jesus talked about these kinds of tendencies when he described the heart. He said in Matthew 15:18, "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart." Small behavior problems are often an indication of a growing heart problem that must be addressed early. With young children tendencies are often changed through practice. Creating a different habit often requires intentional work.

If your son hits you, you might take his hands and firmly say, "You cannot hit mommy." Then pick him up and put him on his bottom near the refrigerator or couch and say, "Come back and see me when you're ready." A child just learning to take a Break like this may need some coaxing to return. You might say, "Okay, come back and now show me that you're ready to do the right thing." Then go back and practice the same situation again. If you were telling her to pick up her toys, tell her again to pick up her toys and where to put them and get a response that doesn't involve hitting you.

You must remain both calm and firm. Pesky behaviors appeal to children because children quickly discern they have power over Mom and Dad, the power to embarrass, anger, or unravel. Your response removes that power. Your calmness is your most effective weapon. Your firmness comes next. As your child learns that every repetition of the bad habit costs what's valued most—your attention—your toddler will eventually make the change.

Remember that habits take time to adjust, even for younger children. Also, some children have a personality characterized by persistence or stubbornness. In that case,

your continued work is essential. The more times you back off because you're tired, distracted, or relapsing into wondering whether it's such a big deal, the longer it will take. Remember to affirm positive changes you're seeing in your toddler. When your daughter immediately comes when you call or accepts a reproof without hitting you, offer affirmation. Look your daughter in the eye and say, "You're learning to obey and come when I call you. That's great. It's fun to watch you grow." Then offer a big hug. Your toddler adores you. When she succeeds in triumphing over her own tendencies to comply with your instruction, it's a big deal. So, draw attention to it.

Be on the lookout for the little foxes in your child's heart. Even though they may be cute at times, think long term. You'll make parenting shifts over the years to address the concerns of your child, but any early indications of problems you'll want to work on now to avoid a bigger correction in the future.



Let's Talk About Consequences

Parents often move to consequences too quickly. Since consequences get worn out and lose their effectiveness over time, it's often best to find other ways to correct such as practicing doing the right thing. It's amazing to see parents who have relied on correction as their primary guidance tool change to training their children with practice sessions to redirect tendencies and habits. The positive focus has significant results.

At some point, though, giving consequences becomes an important part of parenting. Consequences raise the motivation level for a child to change. Alongside teaching and modeling the behavior you expect, you'll also need to convince your child to comply and that often means imposing a consequence when they refuse.

What makes a good consequence? From twelve to eighteen months generally the focus is on firmly requiring children to do what you direct such as come when you call and stop when you say to stop. When you call your son and he doesn't come, you go get him and show him what it means to come when called.

Because a young child's ability to connect conse-

quences with behavior is still tenuous, it's generally not helpful to offer an abstract consequence. You don't say to a one-year-old, if you keep throwing your French fries on the floor then you'll not be able to watch a video when we get home. They don't have the cognitive development to connect the cause with the effect.

In order for a consequence to work with young children it must be fast because their attention span is so short. Waiting even a couple of minutes often results in a loss of connection. Consequences also must be concrete. "Wait until your dad gets home," or "you'll miss out on going to a friend's house later," are empty threats for a toddler. The consequence must be in the moment and tangible.

Consequences also must make an impression. For compliant, eager-to-please children, a firm reproof or a stern or disappointed look is often all that's needed. "Roberto, you must not hit your sister," may be the only consequence he needs to redirect his behavior. Stronger-willed children may need a more firm deterrent to convince them to follow your instruction.

A great tool to use with toddlers is a Break followed by a redo. When the child misbehaves then you say, "When I call you, you need to come. Now you need to take a Break." When the child settles down, then welcome him back and practice coming when called. In other cases, a spanking might be helpful. Both of these consequences are quick, to the point, and generally let your child know you mean business.

Many parents fear spanking is abusive, yet this is based on a misperception of spanking. Hitting in anger or smacking a child with no warning is abusive. Spanking, on the other hand, is offering one or two firm swats in the con-

text of telling your child what he has done wrong. Because children are small, a strong swat isn't as important as the firmness of your voice. Not anger, but firmness communicates the important message in your toddler's mind.

Whatever consequence you decide to impose, you should follow a pattern similar to the following. You give a direct order—"Martha come to me to get dressed"—and Martha runs the other way.

You go to Martha and say, "Martha, I told you to come and you disobeyed by running away. You must do the right thing and obey. Because you disobeyed _____ (insert the consequence you have chosen)." Then impose the consequence. Be sure to end the time with a debriefing by talking about what Martha did wrong and what needs to happen next time. Give a hug and say something like, "Now let's try again. Come with me to get dressed." Then practice doing the right thing.

Young children are learning important lessons about life. It's quite common for a young child to test the limits several times. This is part of the learning experience and needs to be met with firmness, not anger. Consider your child's perspective. He's asking himself, "Can I get away with disobedience at home?" You impose consequences, saying, "No, you can't." Then, he asks, "Can I get away with disobedience at home if Dad is tired?" Firmness says no. "Can I get away with disobeying while Mom is on the phone?" Firmness says no. Can I disobey in the store, at church, at Grandma's, at a friend's house, or when Mom and Dad are arguing? Toddlers will explore every permutation to discern when they can get away with disobedience. If you regularly communicate the same message by your words and your actions, toddlers learn quickly that they in

fact cannot get away with disobeying, and you soon have children who listen to you on several fronts. On the other hand, when you allow them to get away with disobedience, they catch a glimmer of hope that they can sometimes get their way, and that becomes a huge incentive to keep trying.

How do you keep consequences from being abusive? You can't inflict a consequence simply to prove that you're more powerful and can impose your will on a helpless child—that's bullying. You discipline to stop a child from engaging in habits that are founded in selfishness or lead to destruction of relationship. Your discipline needs to be part of a larger process of teaching, modeling, and looking forward to healthy relationships. Anything done out of anger or intended to humiliate, bully, or intimidate your children is abusive. This includes yelling, belittling, threatening to leave your child behind in a public place, hitting, and anything else initiated to physically or emotionally hurt rather than teach.

Hebrews 12:11 says, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." That verse reminds of two things. First, discipline is painful. It's a deterrent and a source of motivation. Second, it's part of training. You can't just focus on what your child did wrong. You also must practice doing what's right.

Repentance is a 180° turn. That means not only that you make a statement about what not to do. It means that you train your child to do what's right. Don't miss that important part of discipline. Teach your child to do the right thing, not just stop the activity that is wrong.



When Mom and Dad Do it Differently

Parents tend to fall into one of two categories: the slower paced, gentle, analytical, in-tune-with-emotions, “let’s talk this out” parent, or the fast-paced, roughhousing, emotional, dramatic, “just-listen-to-me” parent. Often they marry each other.

Bill Cosby famously noted that parents must stick together as a team to survive the children. Yet, many parents fail to create a working relationship because their personal styles differ markedly from each other. Success lies in creating common goals and then finding ways to combine your strengths to accomplish those objectives. It all begins with good communication, value for each other, and humility.

Always keep in mind that there are a number of good ways to parent. The more strict approach works for some kids and the more relational approach works for others. The important thing is to study your child and be willing to make adjustments in your style in order to reach your child’s heart. The challenge happens when parents

begin to polarize their approaches to compensate for the differences. Mom becomes less strict, for example, to compensate for Dad's harsher approach, resulting in gaps that could have been prevented.

Although you and your spouse likely have differences in your parenting, there are some things you can do to stay on the same page. Talking about those differences is a good place to start. Communication forms the foundation of healthy parenting. Next, you'll want to look at the underlying values of the other parent and acknowledge their importance. It's usually not the value that you disagree with. It's the approach or technique you see that causes you concern.

When Karen saw her husband tossing their son into the air and wrestling on the floor, she couldn't help but criticize him for being so rough. Then, she became upset over his gradual withdrawal from both her and their son. One night the tension exploded into a full-blown argument. She made clear her desire for Tom to bond with Jeff. He countered with, "Why do you think I spend so much time playing with him? But every time I try, you pull him away and make me feel like an abusive dad."

As they talked, Karen realized that she loved reading stories, cuddling, and playing quiet games with Jeff. Tom wrestled and roughhoused with his son. Yet, they both wanted the same thing—to bond with Jeff. Once they acknowledged having a common goal, they were better prepared to see how each fulfilled that goal in a different way.

Well-defined goals and clearly communicated methods for reaching those goals become the road map to success. Parenting works much the same way. Parents who want

to give their children the best do better by sitting down together regularly to discuss goals for their children and then develop a clear road map to meet those objectives. In discussing their map, parents often discover their differences. If parents fail to appreciate the strengths each one brings to parenting, conflict can erupt.

James 4:1-2 cautions all of us when he says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it." Parents often want parenting to happen their way, resulting in challenging relationships. They justify their firm stand by saying they want the best for their children.

At the same time, each of you faces the challenge of discovering how to parent. Along the way each of you will make mistakes. Part of being a team is learning how to listen to each other. Perhaps Karen discerned a real fear in Jeff's eyes when being tossed into the air. Perhaps Tom noted Jeff's growing frustration as Karen forced him to sit still for book after book. Parents should listen to each other for insights into how their approach may need some tweaking in order to be the best for their children.

There are times, however, when the other parent lacks significant values that you believe to be necessary for healthy development. For example, one parent may allow a toddler to stay up late, eat junk food, and not clean up. You feel like you're continually in a battle to bring godly values of self-control, wholesome entertainment, and neatness into the picture. Furthermore, the other parent may not be interested in spiritual things and you feel as if you're parenting alone. In those cases, don't underestimate the power you have in your child's life. Do all you can to

persuade the other parent to see the benefit of your values, but if that other person is not responsive then go to work to raise your child with the best influence from you that's possible.

Help your toddler understand the way that you operate and make your rules clear. Kids have an amazing way of adapting to the methods of each environment. Even two-year-olds act differently with the babysitter or with Grandma than with you. That's because they pick up the rules of the game in each situation and make the necessary changes. Make your expectations clear. Engage in activities that you know to be wholesome for your child. Teach good habits and healthy patterns. You'll have a significant impact on your child's development.

Spend time focused on doing what you know to be right instead of criticizing the other spouse. People change and your spouse will eventually experience the consequences of poor parenting. At that point change is likely. Your modeling will provide a wise alternative. However, if you've been critical then you'll likely hinder that change process because you've turned the situation into a pride issue. Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down." That's good advice for moms and dads. Focus on doing your best instead of criticizing someone else. It will keep your eyes going in the right direction and your child will be better off for it.



Discipline in Public

Part way through the worship service two-year-old Grace asked for a drink of water. As Joan pulled items from the bag digging for the Sippy cup, it dawned on her that the cup was sitting on the counter at home. As Joan offered her own un-lidded cup, Grace reached to hold it. Joan knew well Grace's tendency to spill so she whispered, "Honey, mommy will hold the cup."

Grace gave a look and replied, "I hold cup!"

Now Joan has a problem. Does she face a near-certain spill running down the slight incline of the floor and soaking Bibles and purses for rows, or quietly insist that Grace comply? As eyes from people behind bore into her back, Joan whispers, "Grace, you must listen to me. I'll hold the cup."

Grace grabs the cup, steels her eyes, and says rather loudly, "I hold cup!" As they move from disagreement to rebellion, Joan is faced with the problem of disciplining in public.

Parenting in front of others can be a nightmare. Not only must parents determine the proper response to a child's actions, but they also must consider the perceptions

of others and the limitations of the situation.

The first step for developing obedience in public is the expectation of obedience at home. The grocery store is not the place to practice. It's the final exam. Parents should decide what is appropriate behavior for their children while at Grandma's, in Sunday school, and out doing errands. Then practice these expectations at home. Training for outside the home happens in family life. If you expect your child to walk next to you at the grocery store, then you'll want to practice this same activity while on a walk or at the park.

Children most often act out when they're tired, hungry, or out of their routine. If you can avoid these triggers, you'll be less likely to hit the subsequent behavioral minefields. Plan errands and play dates in the morning rather than during nap times. Cut short the visiting after church to get children to lunch. Respect normal bedtimes. While you may not be able to prevent the doctor's appointment that runs through lunch, you can keep those challenges to a minimum to avoid setting your child up to fail. The issue has less to do with disobedience than simply understanding child development and the appropriate expectations of a one- or two-year-old.

Likewise, you'll want to avoid giving a directive that puts your child over the edge. If you tell your daughter to put on her shoes to leave a play date, she should promptly head for her shoes. If it's been a long day and you sense that the stress of sharing toys and eating strange food has your child at her limit, then you don't want your directive to be the final straw. Instead, you may instead simply scoop up your darling, grab her shoes, and playfully carry her to her car seat. As you work within your child's limits,

you'll set her up for success.

Be sure to explain to your child what's expected in a given situation. Children can't comply if they don't know what you want. Sometimes parents make assumptions that, "We've been to Grandma's over and over again and so you should know what's appropriate when you want a snack or want to play in her fish tank." However, children need reminders and the fact that they haven't had a lot of life experience means that they don't come to the same logical conclusions that you do sometimes.

For each outing, take some time to remind your child of what's going to happen and what to expect for that event. Simply offer, "Honey, we are going to the grocery store. Remember that you're going to hold my hand when we get out of the car to walk in the parking lot. You'll get to sit in the cart and talk to me but you must sit still." Short and sweet, you outline the plan. Your child now knows what you want and how to meet your expectations.

Obedience should be the natural response to a parent's instructions both at home and in public. The best way to achieve this kind of cooperation is with practice. Some parents move too quickly to correction strategies when the real solution is practice sessions. You can simulate obedience in restaurants, stores, and the bank while you're at the park, in the back yard, or simply in the house. Practice obeying and you'll develop the patterns necessary for success in public.

Your correction routine needs to contain tools that can be used in public. If you use a Break at home, you can take your misbehaving toddler to a bathroom at the grocery store and use the Break there. If she must go to her room at home, you can take her to sit in the car seat as you stand

outside the car. Often, the most effective consequence is simply to leave the activity. If your child misbehaves at a play date or the store, calmly take her home. You obviously don't have the luxury of that option sometimes, but when you do it might be the best course of action.

None of these are easy or comfortable. If you've planned the trip to the museum for weeks, stood in line, paid admission, and then behavior implodes, the last thing you want to do is discipline your child. However, children will test to see if you'll impose consequences in public. Allow margin in your life for correction and training and you'll have plenty of opportunity to practice following instruction and correction in public.

Discipline takes work and practice pays off over time. Proverbs 29:17 says, "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul." The training starts when your child is young. Good patterns now take work to develop so hang in there even when it's tough.



Teaching Toddlers to Wait

Jasmine's shrieks filled the restaurant. As other patrons turned to stare, Tina and Ray just smiled indulgently and waited for her to stop. Then, they carried on with the conversation as if nothing had happened. By the end of the meal, Jasmine was running through the restaurant nearly colliding with several wait staff, throwing objects from her high chair, and screeching to anyone who would listen. Tina and Ray ignored it all because they believed their daughter's behavior was normal for a two-year-old and that teaching self-restraint would come several years later.

Ray and Tina are confused by the word "normal" and saw it as an excuse to avoid teaching their daughter important skills. Although it's true that two-year-olds are wiggly and loud at times, those normal tendencies can be guided through training. Young children can begin to learn socially appropriate behavior, and public outings can be an opportunity to practice such skills. The fact that toddlers normally lack self-restraint doesn't excuse the need to teach it.

Having a second child often provides opportunities for the first child to learn to wait. After all, now your toddler is

sharing your time and energy with another child. Learning self-restraint becomes more obvious in that situation, so if your child is an only child or no new baby is coming along you'll have to do some extra training.

You may not mind children leaving the table before everyone is finished eating when at home. However, if you don't want to leave the restaurant once children have finished eating, then at least sometimes you'll want to practice that around your own table in the privacy of your home. It's unreasonable to expect children to sit quietly at a restaurant if they routinely run around the house during dinner.

Socially appropriate activity is commonly called manners. Sometimes parents put unrealistic expectations on their children by overemphasizing manners so don't overdo it, but the process of teaching kids to think of others starts in the toddler years.

You might start at home by trying to extend the length of time that your toddler sits until the meal is over. Some toddlers are more naturally able to sit still than others. Yet, all need to master the ability to be at the table for some period of time. Like all training, the practice begins at home. From the time your child sits in a high chair, look for ways to extend the table time. Just because your toddler is done eating doesn't necessarily mean it's time to go play. Extending the time even a few minutes can teach toddlers to wait, a huge skill that will help them develop more self-control.

You set the standard by making this requirement clear and consistently enforcing it. When your toddler beckons to get down, simply say, "We have to wait. It's not time to get down yet." Be sure to include your toddler in the

conversation and mealtime interaction. Verbal skills are practiced and the extra attention may motivate a desire to remain at the table. When in public it's often best to have a few quiet toys reserved solely for meals that can help your child pass the time quietly. This works especially well if the diaper bag is stocked with a few precious delights reserved solely for restaurants.

Try to stretch your child's ability to stay at the table without incurring undue frustration. It's best to allow your child to get down having been a little successful rather than waiting for a temper tantrum as the signal that the training time is over.

As toddlers find their voices, they should also learn to distinguish proper volume for each situation. Again, this comes more easily for some than others. A toddler who lives life at warp speed may love the sound of his voice and the impact that it makes. Relishing this power, young kids may use it often.

It's helpful to give opportunity for toddlers to indulge their desire to be loud with frequent trips to the playground, time in the backyard, or even singing along to music playing in your home. They also need to know when loud is inappropriate, in a restaurant, bank, store, or library, for example.

Your mentoring at this stage will help children understand what's expected in each type of situation. Make it clear when lower volume is required with an easy phrase such as, "Inside voice, please." Be aware of your own volume and perhaps exaggerate the quiet by lowering your tone well below their volume. You might play whispering games even at home to teach children the skill of talking without the vocal cords. That's often new for young chil-

dren. Specifically note when your child chooses to speak quietly in public and offer praise. That means that your child is learning to associate a quiet voice with a certain environment. While it may take a while for this concept to sink in, your clear expectations regarding volume will be contagious and your child will learn self-restraint.

If your child can utter one-syllable words, then “please” and “thank you” can become part of the vocabulary. Make a habit of requiring a please and thank you for every request. No matter how garbled the pronunciation, this habit will stand your child in good stead throughout life. It’s not so much the words but the attitude of graciousness that the child must have in order to use those words. Kids are generally self-focused so using please and thank you forces them to think of others, not just their own needs.

The teaching of manners requires training. Specifically instruct your toddler to say “please” when asking for milk or a toy and insist on it regularly. When your child forgets, you might say, “Say please,” and then wait for the right response. After a while you might just give that look that says you’re waiting to be the non-verbal reminder that the request is not complete without a “please.” As you hand her the desired object, keep your hand on it until she says, “Thank you.”

God encourages us to be considerate of others. Philippians 4:5 says, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” That word “gentleness” is a great word for family life. It actually means being gracious or doing what’s fitting in a given situation.” As your toddler begins interacting with the larger world, you can lay the foundation for consideration for others by teaching restraint and graciousness. Home is the training ground. Manners are a way to show value to others and become the

foundation upon which the concept of “honor” is built.

Your toddler is developing the ability to interact with others. Instead of being the center of life, now your child is learning to live with others, requiring sensitivity to those around. Teaching self-restraint in the form of waiting and appropriate manners in different situations increases your child's skill sets and prepares your toddler for more developmental milestones in the coming years.



Teaching Independence Skills

Kelly hardly knew what to do with herself when Rick was an infant. If he wasn't eating, he was sleeping. She had hours on her hands just waiting for the next short span of time when she could interact with him. Life got busier when he began crawling. Yet, nothing prepared her for toddlerhood. Once he could walk, climb stairs, pull out toys, and race from indoors to out, life's whirlwind left Kelly wondering how she had ever been slightly bored at home. With Rick's seemingly endless demands for her to play, to get a snack, and to go for a walk, the challenge now was getting three free minutes to put in a load of laundry. How could she keep him entertained so she could accomplish the other tasks on her to do list?

Finding the balance between the necessary attention to a young child and all the other demands is challenging for most. First, understand that your toddler's craving for your attention is perfectly appropriate. Because your life is crammed to the hilt with housework, needs of other children, job deadlines, bill management, and a host of other things, you might sometimes view your child's continual requests as impositions. Remember that parents are their

source of life, their reference point, and often their only means for fulfilling both needs and desires. This may give you some greater understanding of your child's intense craving for your undivided attention.

At the same time, you cannot constantly entertain your toddler. You have to get dinner, feed the baby, and pay the light bill. Your toddler's ability to play alone is a skill that must develop, both for your child's sake and yours. For some children this skill comes easier. Some children have a more independent personality and can be quite content sitting on the floor with toys for long periods at a time. For others it's more difficult and some training is required to develop independence. Your work in this area is more than just relieving you from being a playmate so that you can get the house cleaned or the dishes put away. This is character training, teaching your child the valuable heart quality of independence. Although your child may be frustrated at the training at first, given the right set-up and encouragement, your child will learn the valuable skills necessary.

Routines and patterns in your day are often helpful and create expectations in your child of certain periods that play-alone time will take place. Furthermore, your child will learn that there are other times to expect your full attention.

In your daily routine you'll want to include at least one period each morning and each afternoon where your toddler plays independently. In the beginning these periods might be about fifteen minutes long. This is short enough to practice self-entertainment without being so long as to be overly traumatic if the whole time is taken by crying.

While nap times offer your best chance for actually get-

ting work accomplished, the short periods of time for your toddler to play alone teach valuable skills such as the ability to solve a problem, wait for help at a later time, or to abandon an activity for something else that may be less frustrating.

As your child begins to develop a bit of independence, you can lengthen the periods. Of course, some children will play longer right away, but most will need a bit of training. If your child cries, hold out for the fifteen minutes. During that time it's fine to talk and communicate that you're present, but when asked to fix the shirt on the doll or get a drink, then you'll likely want to say something simple such as, "This is play-alone time. We'll work together again in just a few minutes." When the time is up reengage with your child to make it clear that the time is over. Though the training may be frustrating, this frustration becomes the impetus for a child to learn new skills and develop the internal character necessary for more independence to be learned later in areas such as going to the bathroom and putting oneself back to sleep at night instead of requiring a parent.

While your child is playing alone be sure to create a safe, contained place. Whether you use a pack-and-play, a crib, or baby gates to cordon off a corner play area, ensure your toddler's safety by providing a zone that limits freedom. After all, you don't want to start a play-alone time and then have your toddler hanging on your leg.

The boundaries work both to provide a safe area and also to convince your child that this time is for independent play. For some kids this works best if your toddler can still see you, but you may find it better if you're out of sight. Discern which works best for your child. Then, put a

few well-chosen toys, blocks, stuffed animals, busy box, or a ball in the area to investigate. Every so often, rotate toys for new exploration. As you routinely put your toddler in this area, alone time becomes predictable. You can focus on mopping the floor knowing your child is safe.

Keep the TV or video babysitter to a minimum. Because toddlers can't read, videos seem the perfect alternative. They offer clever stories in a format accessible to toddlers. For a busy parent, they look like a free babysitter. Yet, the studies are unanimous. Videos are harmful to a toddler's developing brain. TV watching trains a young child to passively watch as others entertain. This leads to increasingly demanding children who expect you to provide constantly changing entertainment. Minimizing video time forces your child to learn to actively entertain himself. This leads to increasingly cooperative children who can both operate independently and actively engage with you.

God wants his children to experience the security of always knowing that he's there, available, and desiring relationship. It's from the base of security that trust develops for handling all experiences of life. Sometimes we may feel as if our life experiences are somehow outside of God's presence, but that's never the case. He's always there for us and we learn through our daily experience with him to trust him.

We all love Psalm 23 because it describes the close presence of God in our lives. Verse 4 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." It's a great psalm of trust that develops meaning as we trust the Lord daily in our lives.

You're the center of your toddler's world, developing

security and trust. A lot of parental time with young children is essential for good development. You're the most important teacher and that teaching takes place with your child around while you're accomplishing tasks, so it's most often beneficial for you to have your child help you or be with you while you work on other things. Your child needs your attention and modeling. Nothing will change that. Yet, you can also teach your toddler independent skills for short periods in order to develop heart qualities that will be used in future developmental stages.



Talk, Talk, Talk

It's fun to talk to a young child. Whether you're commenting on his beautiful eyes, joking about his stinky diaper, or pointing out a bright blue balloon, you connect by talking. Did you know you're also raising his IQ, helping him interact easily with others, and reducing the likelihood of temper tantrums?

At 12 months most children use between 5 and 20 words. By age 3, they use around 300 words and understand closer to 900. Infants typically focus on "Mama" and "Dada." By 24 months, toddlers put together 2 to 3 words in a sentence. By age 3, they can carry on conversations with complex sentences. Through all this change your toddler's emerging ability to put thoughts into words allows him to build connections, express his desires, and take appropriate control over his world. As you help your child develop in this area, you provide skills for engaging with you and others.

Talk often with your child. Conversation teaches so many things. As you name objects when you hand your child the juice or toss a ball, you give the words needed when he's thirsty or wants to play. Your conversation

also provides the pattern for knowing how to put words together. Your child learns inflection to distinguish statements from questions. By doing this your child will grow in the ability to verbally express desires instead of expressing displeasure with a temper tantrum.

Equally important is listening when your toddler speaks. Listening affirms that your toddler's thoughts are important, encourages the use of words to accomplish tasks, and gives your child the chance to practice and expand verbal skills.

Finally, as you converse, you begin to open your child's eyes to the power of words. Proverbs 18:21 says, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit." In the beginning God used words to create the world, bringing life. At the same time, in the Garden of Eden Satan used words to deceive Eve and introduce death. Words still contain the power to give life or cause death. As you concentrate on offering life-giving words to your toddler, you model how to use the developing power of speech for life.

Although your child is very young and is in the early steps of developing a vocabulary, it's important to realize the significance of your teaching in this area. It will take years to develop life-giving words but the process starts now as you give your child the confidence that speech is powerful.

One of the ways to increase vocabulary is to read picture books. As you explore books with your toddler, the pictures hold attention and give meaning as you share words. You point and note, "the dog jumps," and your child learns the words for familiar objects and concepts. As you ask about the pictures, you offer the chance to practice communicat-

ing with you. Snuggles add positive incentive and create a great foundation for interaction, remembering that words are only one of the ways that communication takes place.

When you give instructions be sure to keep it simple. “Please bring me your cup” gives your toddler a chance to practice both understanding your words and acting on them. This teaches good listening skills, essential for good communication. Some parents express in bucket format what needs to be said in just a teaspoonful of words. Toddlers need it simple.

Be careful about constant correction of pronunciation. The goal is to practice talking to each other. Your proper pronunciation and grammar will model for your child what needs to be learned. Your toddler will likely have a more babyish pronunciation. It’s easier to pronounce the sounds of m, d, n, w, h, and t. Sounds at the back of the throat such as k, g, l or blends such as sp, br, tr are much harder. Thus, pronunciation will develop as control over the tongue and lips increases. Constant correction may shut a child down. If you let children pronounce words in their own way but continue to model proper pronunciation and grammar, skills usually develop naturally. Most professionals wouldn’t encourage speech therapy until a child is five or six years old because most problems solve themselves by then.

Keep in mind that good communication skills aren’t generally learned by watching TV and videos. The characters on the tube can’t make eye contact, respond to your child’s chatter, or offer any connection. Furthermore, they encourage passive watching instead of active engagement. Thus, they actually work against language development in your toddler. You might occasionally use videos as a dis-

traction to get dinner prepared, but don't count on them to help your toddler develop social skills.

Using "baby talk" yourself, while cute, fails to offer your child the model needed to develop adult communication. Just speak normally and your child will learn how to participate in the conversation.

Children develop at vastly different paces. Sam Chatterbox may begin using full sentences at 14 months, while your 30-month-old still uses only a few words at a time. Mastering language may not matter as much to him as building blocks. Furthermore, if there are older siblings who read your toddler's cues accurately, your child may be unwilling to expend the energy necessary to learn how to pronounce properly. If you provide an environment rich in positive communication, kids usually develop language skills at their own pace.

At the same time, language delays can cause your toddler intense frustration. Wanting the blue ball on the top shelf but having adults hand you a teddy bear and then put you in your crib because you appear fussy is incredibly frustrating. Toddlers whose language is delayed have more frequent tantrums because people can't understand them. It may be helpful to teach a few sign language symbols to help bridge the gap between a toddler's ability to conceive a thought and the muscle or vocabulary development needed to express that idea. You provide a way to communicate that reduces frustration.

If you're concerned that your child has a speech issue, get advice from your pediatrician. Sometimes there are things you can do right now to encourage development and other times you'll want to focus on confidence instead of correction to help your child have a greater sense of internal

security before tackling the challenge of speech delays.

Go ahead, compliment your child's beautiful eyes and joke about the stinky diaper. As you do, you not only build connections with your child, but you also teach ways to connect with the world.



Teaching Toddlers to Share

Imagine that after years of saving, sacrifice, and longing you finally purchase your dream car. You pull into the driveway and pause to drink in the new car smell. You step out to admire the gleaming paint job, the fine curves, the gorgeous detailing. As you gaze upon it, your neighbor meanders over. The mustard from the hot dog he's holding dribbles down the dingy white T-shirt stretched across his paunch. He scratches his three-day-old whiskers and mussed hair as he drawls, "So, you got your new car. She's a beauty. Can I take her for a spin?"

That knot in the pit of your stomach closely resembles the feeling your toddler experiences every time someone wants to take his prized Legos or new fire truck. While adults value sharing, we actually don't have to share very often. We drive our own cars, talk on our own cell phones, and put our own candy bars on the high shelf where no one can find them. Thus, we can lose track of just how hard sharing can be. Try sharing a desk, the car, or your computer and you'll remember why this is such an internal battle. Yes, parents need to teach their children to share. But, remember the knot.

Teaching children to share involves a complex mix of heart qualities so your work in this area is very important and requires patience and perseverance. Some children resist so your persistence and continual training will require that you hang in there even after you feel like quitting. Sharing requires self-denial, consideration, and sacrifice instead of selfishness and protecting one's territory. Those are huge concepts for anyone. This isn't an area where you can give an instruction and walk away. You'll need to remain engaged, offering guidance, encouragement, and tips on how to make the process work.

God has a lot to say about thinking of others. Hebrews 13:16 reminds us that sharing is important for adults, not just for kids, "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." There's no better place to teach this essential adult quality than in the heart of a toddler.

Foundational to sharing is the concept of giving to others. Giving requires compassion and thoughtfulness. Part of the challenge of teaching this to toddlers is their incredibly concrete thinking. You offer, "Let Allie have the doll for five minutes then it will be your turn." Five minutes means nothing to toddlers. Their brains can only contemplate now, and now is when they want the doll. Either they have it and are happy or they don't have it and are sad, angry, and frustrated. They simply can't understand that they'll soon get the object back. Their life experience is so limited that they tend to think in terms of now instead of waiting. Sharing helps expand their horizons in this area.

You may want to work within their concrete thinking, using methods that will make more sense developmentally. When two children want the same object, you might

say, "I'm setting the timer. Allie gets the doll for five minutes, and then Jane gets it for five minutes. When you hear the ding, it's Jane's turn." While they can't understand minutes, toddlers can understand dings. This puts the situation within their skill set. You may still have to persuade them to obey, but you have removed the hardest hurdle, not comprehending when it is their turn to play with the coveted doll. With many children, just knowing that they'll get full use of the doll is enough. Allie may actually tire of the doll before her turn expires and graciously turn it over to Jane before the ding. If you see this, praise her for her sharing heart.

In the sharing process children must learn how to obtain the toy from the other child. Grabbing isn't an alternative for obtaining your turn. The concrete thinking in a child's mind has a hard time comprehending how to obtain a toy that another child has. The obvious answer in the child's mind is to take the toy.

Between 18 months and age three, toddlers begin the huge transition from considering only themselves to considering others. Teaching your toddler to share becomes a practical arena for laying this foundation. As you guide your toddler in sharing, you teach your child to show respect for others. Though they'll spend the rest of their lives exploring the layers of this concept, a good starting point is that you can't take from others no matter how badly you want something.

How do you help the child who tends to grab? When your child grabs a toy, intervene quickly, calmly, and firmly. Take the toy from your child. Say something along the lines of, "We must show respect to others. Allie had the doll first; it's her turn. You must wait." Hand the doll to

your child and tell her to give it to Allie.

At this point, if the playtime has been going relatively well, you might then say, “Allie, you can play with the doll until the timer dings and then you’ll need to give Jane a turn.” This lets Jane know that respect for others doesn’t equate to never getting the doll. She’ll get what she wants but in the context of thinking of others.

If, on the other hand, Jane has been ripping toys out of others’ hands all day, you’ll need to impose a consequence by having her sit aside for a bit until she’s ready to come back and try the right way. You might take the doll and say something like, “We show respect to others. You keep taking toys from others. That’s wrong. We do the right thing. We share.”

Toddlers are black and white creatures. Clear delineation works within their concreteness to help them understand clear boundaries. Don’t elaborate too much. Simple and clear is better than a long monologue. Then, remove Jane from the play area for two to three minutes or impose a consequence you know to be effective. As she reenters the play area, remind Jane, “You need to do the right thing. Wait for your turn. If Allie is playing with a toy you want, ask her for a turn.” If Jane asks for a turn and Allie balks, use the timer strategy to give both a chance.

Exhausting? Yes. God created a long toddler phase knowing it would take at least this much time to begin learning the toddler lessons. Teaching selflessness is never easy. Yet the time and energy you invest now is clearly defining how to rightly treat others. Correcting wrong treatment lays the foundation for your child to enter preschool years with the skills to engage others, cooperate in group activities, and begin reaching out. Your toddler builds on

these early skills of restraining selfishness and moves into the school years better able to receive instruction, act considerately, and form friendships.

Habits shape character. If you tolerate the refusal to share, you encourage a habit of selfishness and self-centeredness that will cripple your child in coming stages. As you encourage habits of sharing, you help shape a character that considers and connects with others, teaching your child to both give and receive. Though a lot of work, the investment pays hugely in coming years.

On those days your toddler seems to fight over every object in the toy room, pause. Recall the last time you had to wait for the phone or stand in a slow checkout line. That sense of “I want it now” is exactly the reason your toddler is acting out. As you offer tips on the intricacies of putting others first, you enable your child to become less selfish.



A Toddler's Temper

Toddlers can get vicious sometimes. When they get angry they bite, kick, hit, grab, pinch, push, and when that doesn't work, they often throw themselves to the ground kicking and screaming. The temper of a toddler can be downright scary at times causing parents to run for cover or get their own backs up as well.

Here's what's happening. At about age 20-24 months several developmental issues come together. The child is more mobile, finally able to reach things without parental help. The toddler is gaining a greater sense of control, the ability to do things for himself such as eating and drinking. Both large muscle and small muscle development is improving, giving kids the ability to try new toys, push buttons, stack blocks, and move things around.

All of these new developments are met with limitations. Now your son wants to take off his shoe but he can't quite do it. He wants to stack the blocks but they keep falling over. The baby gate is an obstacle he can't overcome. Furthermore, parents interrupt play, enforce boundaries, and require that he sit in a car seat, stroller, or high chair even though he'd rather be free. It's in those moments that

frustration develops quickly. Most toddlers don't know what to do with the new feelings of being out of control, and the emotion overrules whatever thinking might otherwise be helpful.

Toddlers then react with their control behaviors of choice. Violence, loudness, and defiance are high on the list. One of the tasks of toddlerhood is to learn how to deal with frustration and emotion. For some children the process of frustration management lasts well into the pre-school years. Children eventually learn how to talk about it, get help, or slow down and persevere. Your job is to begin the process now. Here are some solutions that will help you. Keep in mind that you're working to help your child accomplish James 1:19, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." It takes work but it is possible.

First, let's start with you. It's interesting that most parents get angry when their kids get angry. After all, when your emotion rises, you have considerable energy that you can then use to simply overpower your child with yelling or forcing the child to act. Keep in mind that your anger isn't helpful and it's not necessary to help your child. In fact, the very next verse, James 1:20 is a great reminder for parents, "for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." First, slow down your own anger. Your child needs help, not harshness. Then you'll be ready for the next step.

One of the most important lessons you can teach your toddler about anger is that angry reactions don't work. Young children learn best through experience. So, if each time your son throws a fit you scoop him up and place him in the hall until he settles down, he learns that his anger

didn't work, and that he needs to settle down in order to reenter family life.

If your daughter bites out of frustration, simply picking her up and removing her from the situation to the other room to settle down and saying, "Be gentle," communicates a message that violence isn't tolerated and you miss out if you're out of control.

This approach works, but some children get it faster than others. Emotions reside in the heart but so do the tools such as gentleness and self-control that keep emotions in check. Children who are separated from play to settle down often have temper tantrums. Don't then assume that your discipline approach isn't working. Sometimes the temper tantrum alone in the hall is actually heart work. The child is wrestling with emotions and learning how to settle down. It takes time for some kids to come to the understanding that settling down and keeping calm are the best response for continued play.

If a child has a problem with biting or other forms of violence then your job is to monitor that child more carefully. When you see the signs of frustration developing be quick to intervene. You want to catch your daughter before she pulls her brother's hair. That early intervention and quick action provides a coaching approach for your child. Concentrated work in this area is often required for a child to develop new patterns but your persistence pays off.

As soon as your child is able to speak you'll want to give exact words to say. Ideally, saying "I don't like that" provides your child with words to use instead of becoming violent when your child feels mistreated. Even at a young age you're teaching your child to talk about it. You might suggest other words for different situations such as "Please"

or “My turn?” to get what they want instead of grabbing.

If a child uses words and isn't successful it's important for that child to have a plan B by coming to you for help. Helping a child relieves frustration. You already know that and that's why you assist with the jacket, shirt, or shoes. But the step of seeking help is also important. You might say to your toddler as you see frustration building, “Remember, I'm willing to help you. Come and ask me when you're ready.” The skill of asking for help is equally important and toddlers can learn to use it.

At the same time that you're teaching your child to ask for help you'll also want to be encouraging your child to hang in there and solve the problem independently. Working independently with perseverance and getting help are two opposite ways of solving a problem but both are solutions that children need to work on. As a parent, you'll want to monitor the frustration level. Frustration is a good teacher and a sense of satisfaction is the result of perseverance. But frustration can also become overwhelming, resulting in discouragement. Part of your job is to know when to step in and when to encourage your child to overcome the obstacle alone.

Firmness and time together help young children develop self-control and gentleness in their play. When parents have a coaching attitude with their kids then children learn how to manage their emotions. Hang in there. Keep your emotions under control and watch growth take place.



Should We Allow Our Toddler to Sleep With Us?

Lori rubbed her eyes as she felt a body clambering over her to the middle of the bed. A glance at the clock told her that Joseph had made it a little longer tonight. It was nearly 3:00 am before he traveled from his bed to his parents'. As he settled into a ball in the curve of her back, they both drifted to sleep.

The debate rages over whether allowing children to sleep in their parents' beds borders on the abusive or is the pinnacle of parenting care. The bottom line, there is no right or wrong answer. Instead, this issue falls squarely in that broad category of parenting choices that are best ruled by your circumstances, preferences, and style.

Issues such as these require wisdom. What's good for one family may not be for another. Wisdom is the ability to see the other issues involved and not just focus on the one piece. Proverbs 2:6 says, "For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." This subject is one of many that parents must take to the Lord and ask him for guidance and direction.

For those wary of allowing toddlers to sleep in their bed, note that for most of the rest of the world and for the vast majority of history, this was never an issue. Children and parents slept together. Instinctively, humans long for the security and the intimacy of sharing a sleeping area. So, children who crave to be with you are not rebellious, difficult, or deficient in developmental maturity. They simply act on their own longing to be close. Giving in to this desire does not make you a poor or indulgent parent. Notably, families who first had biological children and then adopt frequently follow advice to allow their adopted children to sleep with them in order to bond and offer security. After seeing the benefits, many wish they had followed this pattern with their biological children instead of being so firm.

Many parents opt to set firm boundaries around sleeping areas. For a variety of reasons, they choose to have children learn to stay in their own beds. Setting these boundaries doesn't necessarily make you a calloused or neglectful parent. So how do you negotiate this issue and develop a strategy that works for your family? Here are a few thoughts to help you in your consideration.

Be sure to consider the safety issues involved. Though toddlers' ability to control their bodies and move out of your way makes sleeping with you safer than for infants, they're still far smaller than either parent. As you consider whether they should sleep with you, make sure your bed is big enough to accommodate another body without squishing. Do they have room between you and them? Furthermore, are you a light enough sleeper to be aware of their position and account for it? Do you tend to use substances that make you unresponsive during sleep such as sleeping aids, alcohol, or prescriptions with drowsiness as

a side effect? If you can safely accommodate your child, allowing your toddler to sleep with you may become an option. If you can't, you should focus on other arrangements.

Another important factor to consider is your own sleep. Articles abound about getting infants and toddlers to sleep, revealing that the challenge is widespread. Most children must learn the skill of sleeping, especially the skill of going back to sleep once awakened. Whether you follow the "let them cry it out," "rock them to sleep," or "sleep on their floor" approach, the goal is for everyone to sleep. If your child's entry to your bed is fairly quiet and leads to a full night of sleep for everyone and the alternative is him crying until he throws up night after night with no sleep in sight, allowing a shared bed may fit the bill. Alternatively, if your little guy rolls, kicks, or jabbars through the night, then the loss of sleep for parents dictates a different alternative. The best test is to simply ask the question "Is it working?"

It's also important to consider the needs and wishes of the other parent. Differences in opinions in this area of parenting can create significant tension and even feelings of competition between a parent who would rather not have an addition to the bed and a child. Studies show that the dissatisfaction rating for marriage among men peaks when toddlers are in the home. A variety of factors contribute to this fact, including Mom feeling overwhelmed by the care-giving role. If Mom adds multiple children and a career to the mix, often the mental framework appears to be competition, and sharing a bed with a child further complicates the problem. This can be a recipe for marital distance.

With the financial, social, emotional, and spiritual ad-

adjustments that form this stage of family life, couples must actively work to keep their relationship top priority. This includes preserving the special intimacy of the bedroom in all its expressions. If parents develop strategies to preserve their relationship while accommodating the visits of their toddler, then that's great. If intimacy begins to suffer, couples must find a way to address the issue.

Further, both parents should agree about whether bed sharing works. Parents need to develop together what strategies they'll use to satisfy their child's craving for security and intimacy. Everyone needs sleep and you as a couple need time alone.

Teaching a child to stay in bed has a number of important components. As always, firmness can be misunderstood and misperceived by the child. Many experts focus on convincing parents to leave the child in his room and allow him to cry, yell, or kick until he falls asleep. For many children this works and they do learn to stay in their bed, a relief for everyone.

Yet, while he learns "I have to stay in bed" what other message might be coming through? Is he learning, "when I cry out at night, no one comes," "when I'm scared, I can't count on my parents to help me," or "I'm on my own"? A child's most foundational assumptions about the world are formed during their early years, so you'll want to frame your firmness with love and hope. You might say, "You're two and a half now. That means that you're old enough to stay in your own room all night. You're growing up. I'm going to help you to stay in your room because it's not best for you to sleep in Mommy and Daddy's bed." Empathy and compassion can coincide with firmness to accomplish your objectives.

For most parents the rush to kiss a boo-boo, the hug when the child is frightened of the dog, and the ongoing security of your presence during the normal course of the day provide the assurance that your little guy can count on you to care for and protect him. This helps balance the nightly cry. Yet, for parents who are away all day at a job, see their child briefly in the evening before putting him to bed, and then choose to follow the “let child cry it out approach” to sleeping, this balance is in jeopardy. You’ll need to be especially mindful of utilizing opportunities to confirm your role as his primary comforter, protector, and caregiver.



Dealing with Nightmares

From birth, children vary quite a bit when it comes to sleep. While some infants sleep through the night from the day they come home, many don't sleep through the night until their first birthday. When toddlers sleep through the night, parents finally enjoy a full night's sleep. Ah, joy. Nightmares or night terrors, however, bring a challenge to family life at a quite inopportune time.

A toddler's developing imagination is important and encourages the telling of stories, engaging in dramatic play, and even developing an understanding of what parents do while away. That same imagination, however, can trigger terrifying nightmares. You can encourage a developing imagination while protecting your toddler from the fright of the night.

Nightmares are different than night terrors. While nightmares are far more common and more likely to develop during the toddler years, both can occur. A nightmare takes place during REM sleep, three to five hours into the sleep schedule. Night terrors take place earlier as children transition from a deep sleep, usually during the first couple hours of their sleep cycle. When a nightmare takes place,

a child can be awakened and comforted. During a night terror the child doesn't respond to comfort and isn't easily awakened. Children often remember nightmares vividly but often can't remember the night terror at all. During a nightmare a child can communicate with you but during a night terror a child may thrash around, scream, or look terrified but isn't communicative. Because nightmares and night terrors are different you'll want to carefully discern which your child is experiencing to know what to do next.

Though night terrors seem scarier to parents because of the inability to wake the child or to have a reasonable dialogue, night terrors are actually less scary than nightmares for a child. Children typically don't even remember having them. Because night terrors are generally thought to be caused by an underdeveloped ability to transition between sleep stages, the real remedy is coping until the brain has sufficiently matured to make this transition. However, parents can offer comfort for the interim.

To head off night terrors, create a stable bedtime routine. Setting a regular bedtime for youngsters helps ensure that they get adequate nighttime sleep (toddlers need about eleven hours per night plus naps). Following the same predictable pattern each evening such as giving a bath, reading a book, and tucking in with a prayer allows the child to recognize that it's time for bed and to begin mentally relaxing.

Stress can also trigger night terrors. If you know of stressors for your child such as a new daycare, divorce, or adjusting to a new sibling, try to reduce the stress as much as possible. Predictability offers toddlers security that reduces stress. If traveling, keep a favorite blanket or stuffed animal to make the new sleep space feel familiar.

If your child does experience a night terror, waking him can make the situation much scarier because of the deep sleep. Many children can't be awakened. Instead, remove any objects that might cause harm. As hard as it may be, simply be present and keep the space safe until your child gets through the episode. Sometimes your toddler will wake up, be surprised you're there, and fall back to sleep.

Nightmares tend to be caused by your child's brain attempting to process information received during the day. A developing imagination and an immature understanding of life events can impair this process and lead to scary images. Daddy snapping at another driver can be mistranslated as a monster looming overhead. Very loud shopping places can be processed as a gang of scary creatures grabbing for him. Nearly all young children experience nightmares at some point and there are ways parents can help process them.

As with night terrors, a healthy bedtime routine is helpful. Structure provides security. Additionally, limit television viewing, especially scary content. Jaded adults may not fully appreciate the scare-factor of many shows for more innocent children. Even cartoons or movie scenes designed for humor, such as tricking a child into eating worms, can be funny when viewed but appear scary during sleep. Finally, offer a familiar bed with favorite animals or blankets to build security. A nightlight can work wonders to transition a scary dark room into one that's cozily lit.

If your child does have a nightmare, comfort is the best solution. Listen patiently, respond to the fear, and offer reassurance that, though the dream may have seemed very

real, it isn't. Your calmness will help ease your toddler back to sleep. Offering a drink of water or a different stuffed animal may change the mood enough to bring peaceful sleep.

Because nightmares are incredibly vivid for children, your child may want to tell you about the dream the next morning. Listen for clues as to what may have triggered the nightmare to see if there are books, shows, or locales you should avoid. You may also gain insight on how your child misunderstood an ordinary situation as frightening. Explaining the scary situation so that better understanding takes place may allow better sleep at night.

Giving your child a phrase or song to use to ward off fear can also help. For instance, you might teach the song, "Jesus Loves Me," and encourage singing it when frightened. This song reminds us all that though we are weak, Jesus is strong and he can take care of us in the dark when things seem a bit scary. Furthermore, this begins to tie your Bible teachings to practical, everyday events, training your toddler to take fears to the One who provides comfort.

Caring for a child who has trouble with nightmares or night terrors can be a trying experience. In those moments it's best to look at your responsibility as an opportunity to love and comfort. It's another time when you demonstrate your love by serving. Jesus taught his disciples about a servant kind of leadership. In John 13:14-15, Jesus, having washed the disciples' feet says, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." When you sit next to a frightened child you're doing exactly what Jesus was teaching. Caring for a child at night is all about being a servant, not only for your child but also before God.



Dealing with Separation Anxiety

You're the center of your child's life, the source of security, the home base, the one that makes life work. Furthermore, moving toward independence can be a bit scary. The ability to grow in independence is based on confidence and security. You provide that familiarity that becomes the basis for exploration into new territory. Many children struggle with the need to separate. They become quite attached to their parents and moving away from them is a challenge. Starting at around nine months and continuing until about age three, children struggle at various times and to various levels with letting you leave.

Your child's separation anxiety isn't poor development, isn't manipulative, and isn't wrong. This anxiety is an expression of all that's going on inside and illustrates the depth of attachment to you. Because it isn't just bad behavior, you can't just "parent better" to make it go away. Parents who view separation anxiety as misbehavior miss the point and often use the wrong tools to solve the problem.

Separation anxiety is an emotional attachment. It's helpful to separate the emotion from the behavior as you

work on solutions. The emotions aren't wrong but your child may engage in wrong behavior in the process. You want to teach your child proper behavior during separation times while at the same time empathizing and even validating the emotion inside.

We all need comfort and security, even as adults. God knew that as he was leading the Israelites. He said in Deuteronomy 31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." Those kinds of words bring comfort to our hearts as we experience the challenges of our own lives. Children are learning independence, but they need to do it with a sense of security as they venture out into new and uncomfortable territory. Here are some tools for easing the trauma.

Practice at home. Give your independence-seeking toddler small chances to be independent with you in reach. Encourage play in the family room while you mop the kitchen. Play Hide and Seek. Send your child to another room to get a diaper for you to change. As toddlers experience situations where you're gone and then reappear, they grow in the confidence that separating doesn't mean you're gone forever.

When a separation time is approaching, make the transition predictable. Since your child seeks security from your presence, concentrate on making the situation in which you leave as secure as possible. Give your toddler a little warning. Remember that too much warning too early can create the fear of anticipation, but some kind of advance notice can allow your child the emotional transition to face what's coming.

Create a routine. Ensure that your toddler has other

security objects such as blankets, a pacifier, or a stuffed animal. If you're taking him to the church nursery, then, in a low-key manner, as you're dressing him say something like, "You'll eat your cereal, then we will get into the car. When we get to church, Daddy will take you to see Miss Cindy at the nursery. You'll get to play with the cool cars and blocks. We will pick you up right after playtime."

While your toddler can't understand time or even remember all of the steps, you're easing the situation by anticipating what's going to happen. To the extent that you can, follow the same pattern each time you separate. By reminding your child that you'll return after some time, you address the fear that you aren't coming back. By including the blanket, your child carries a bit of the security of you into the next situation. This isn't magic. You'll likely still have episodes. Yet, the more you follow a routine in separating, the more quickly the situation will feel secure.

If you know your child struggles with separating, you might offer some control over the situation through choices. "When we go to the nursery, do you want to take your teddy bear or your seal? Do you want to wear your blue dress or purple pants and shirt?" When a child is able to take ownership of part of the situation, greater confidence can make the separation less painful.

If possible, ask sitters, in-laws, or friends to provide a distraction as you leave. While you may not want to sneak out when your toddler's back is turned, you can allow the caregiver to begin a game or start an activity and wave good-bye as she's carried to the play area.

Some parents make the mistake of hanging around too long. It's as if the parent is also having a hard time separating. It's best to keep the plan simple. Say goodbye. Get

another caregiver involved with your child and then leave as quickly as it seems reasonable.

If you leave a child crying while you go off to church, you can feel upset for the whole next hour because of the last glimpse of your child's emotion. To help soothe your mind, you might ask the caregiver to text you on your phone after about ten minutes to give you an update. Generally, you'll hear that your child has adjusted and is happily playing.

If your child is struggling with extreme separation anxiety, you may need to institute "practice separations" where you leave and, if when you call later your child is still upset, you return. Consistent experiences of good care while you're gone accompanied by you returning quickly will eventually persuade him that separation is okay.

There may simply be a period where you won't be able to leave your child. Joyce had seven children who all loved going to the church nursery, Grandma's, and to stay with her friend. The eighth child, however, uncontrollably sobbed. Even the nursery director with thirty years experience comforting babies gave up and called Joyce to retrieve her daughter. Though Joyce and Dave followed every tip on easing the anxiety, Anna bawled until they returned.

On the days they both had to be gone, those with Anna did their best to comfort her. Most of the time, Anna simply stayed with a parent. Anna would play happily at home on her own, but out of the house, Anna needed a parent. When Anna turned four, it's as if a switch flipped, and she skipped into her Sunday school room never looking back. Her parents' ongoing care built a reservoir of security that carried Anna through her separations.

Though Anna's situation was extreme, it demonstrates

two important truths. First, parents often must minister to their kids in the ways each child needs. Joyce and Dave realized that Anna needed one of them. Though they gently encouraged her to try new situations, they remained available to step in if she simply couldn't cope. Secondly, this is a stage. It ends. Though you may fear never being able to go to the bathroom alone again, given the consistent, loving presence of supportive parents, your child will learn to let you go.

Most toddlers experience some separation anxiety. This is a high compliment and a witness to their deep connection to you. While you can ease the anxiety, accept that this may be part of your life for a time. You might want to even take comfort in the clinging now. A day will come when your child is so busy that you'll long for time together.



How to Determine Readiness for Potty Training

“I potty trained my daughter in one day!” Linda shares excitedly at the playgroup.

“Congratulations,” offers Sheri. “I remember how great it felt to get Joey trained. He was only eighteen months, but it was such a relief to get out of diapers. He was able to go early to the preschool. They won’t admit you until the child is potty trained, you know. I was so glad he could get a head start.”

Janice smiles and offers congratulations while inwardly groaning, “When will my child use the potty? Eighteen months! Samuel is nearly three and won’t go near the bathroom without screaming. What am I doing wrong?” Little does she know, Janice is not alone and it’s likely not her fault.

Potty training is often one of the greatest parenting challenges during the toddler years. In order to master this developmental milestone your little one must interpret a whole range of somewhat confusing physical signals and figure out how to use muscles that have only recently de-

veloped. Your child must interpret biological cues, restrain the body one moment and let it go another, and do all of this while wishing to continue to play with toys. The first step in potty training is a challenge all its own, discerning when your child is ready.

How old should a child be? When other moms brag about how young their children used the toilet, you can feel inferior if your child takes a little longer. Yet, forcing a child too early only leads to frustration and turmoil. Some children are ready as early as eighteen months. However, even some of those kids aren't really ready. More often the parents are trained to see a child's facial expression and rush them to the bathroom. That's not a bad system, but real potty training happens later. Some children are closer to age four. Review the following signs to discern when your child is ready. If you push too early you'll not only face a losing battle, you could strain developing muscles and may make your child feel like a failure. That's not a good start for this complicated learning experience.

It's important to look for the cues. With some children it's possible to wait too long, missing the point of readiness and having to go back and recapture that later. Study your child for signs of readiness.

Can he use words easily? Potty training requires children to interpret a complex series of signals and respond. Because this mirrors verbal development, how easily your child converses may be a helpful signal indicating readiness. If your toddler still has trouble expressing words, brain development may not be ready to deal with the complexity of potty training. A child must be able to express the need to use the bathroom and understand your directions about what to do. Once you notice the ability to express de-

sires and follow your directions in other areas, your child may be ready for the next step.

Can he manipulate his clothes? A toddler who can routinely pull his pants up and down has both the fine motor control and the mental processing to begin potty training, although the specific muscle control may still need a bit more time. As you begin the process, you'll want to dress your child in loose pants or shorts to make the quick trips even easier. If your child struggles even with easily manageable clothing, you may want to wait.

Interest is another indicator and is often viewed as a primary cue of readiness. If your toddler tries to sit on the potty, announces a dirty diaper, or likes underwear of older siblings, these all indicate readiness to begin the training process. Though you'll still have some work to do, your toddler's interest provides the impetus to get started.

Remember that potty training comes in stages. Controlling the bladder during the day is usually the first step. Then comes the bowels. Managing bladder control at night is a later step that's not often consistent until a child is seven or eight years old.

An additional step is often required to use the toilet in a public restroom. With all the new kinds of toilet flushing mechanisms, some children become fearful using a toilet in public or engaging in such a private activity while not in the comfort of your own home. The process takes time, patience, encouragement, and a lot of love.

One mom reported that she had the potty training down at home but the unpredictable whoosh of the public toilet was scary to her son. The automatic flushing toilet went off while he was sitting on it, a scary experience even for adults sometimes. So, to help her son become more

comfortable, they went on a restroom exploration adventure. They didn't go into the public restroom to use the facility but simply to flush the toilets. The process was fun for her son and eased his anxiety when it was time to actually use the toilet.

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven," says Ecclesiastes 3:1. Although Solomon probably didn't have potty training in mind when he wrote those words, the principle still applies. If the current season doesn't produce results, you may want to stop pushing for a while and revisit the whole issue in a few months.

Comparing your child with others might help you know if you're in the ballpark with expectations. At the same time, every child is unique. While you take in information from a variety of sources, be sure to apply the information in the context of your own child. As you study your toddler looking for signs of readiness, you'll not only time potty training well, but you'll build confidence in parenting to your child's needs rather than comparing to anyone else.



Potty Training is a Process, Not an Event

“**W**hatever you do, don’t turn potty training into a control issue,” cautions magazine after magazine addressing the issue of potty training. As Margaret, in desperation, grabs her fourth book on “How to Potty Train Your Child,” the words leap from the page. Resolving once again to take the advice, she smilingly coaxes her son to the bathroom. After twenty minutes of no action, she lets him up. Just as she gets to the kitchen she hears, “Mommy, I had an accident.” Frustration floods over her as she chokes back, “What do you mean you had an accident? We were just on the potty for twenty minutes!” The control she was losing was her own.

Don’t let anyone kid you. Potty training is all about control, but we’re not talking about a battle of the wills between parent and child. The goal is to train toddlers to control newly developed muscles to refrain from doing something they have always done in order to do something new they have never done. From a parenting perspective it’s all about motivation. You want to look for all kinds of

ways to motivate your child. You can take a toddler to the potty, but you can't make him use it. However, you can increase his desire to try. Here are some suggestions.

Make sure you have the basic equipment to do the job. That may seem obvious but let's go back and review to make sure we have it all. Basic equipment includes some sort of potty-chair, a stack of underwear, pants easy to get up and down, and a block of time to concentrate on the process.

Some parents use an adapter over their toilet to make the opening smaller for children to sit comfortably. This eliminates extra cleaning since you just normally flush.

Others use an actual potty chair since the size is designed for toddlers so it's comfortable and feet touch the floor creating a sense of security. Plus, your child can actually see the results, a great natural incentive. A cool design to the chair with music that plays or pictures of cartoon characters can help make the process more exciting.

Cloth training pants allow your child to actually feel wet which spurs some kids to actually want to use the potty. "Big boy pants" also serve as an incentive. Other toddlers can walk around in wet underwear all day without care. If this is your child, disposable training pants may save frustration and furniture.

Don't assume your child knows what potty training is all about. Educating your toddler is an important part of the process. Explain as clearly as you can what you expect your child to do and the result you'd like to see. At first you may simply want your child to get used to the potty chair. State, "Kyle, each hour I'm going to take you to the potty, and I want you to sit there for one minute. I'll set the timer and stand with you. When it beeps, you can get up."

Kyle knows what he must do and knows when he's done. This knowledge enables him to cooperate. For some children this step takes one trip to the bathroom; others may need days of encouragement to willingly sit on the seat. This is simply a cooperation issue and you don't want to demand anything but sitting on the potty. That's all.

At the next stage you might fill him with juice or water and then instruct, "I want you to sit longer on the potty and try to go in it. Squeeze your muscles (point to the area just below his belly button) so that the water can come out. We will sit here for five minutes." While he may not fully understand, this gives an idea of what to do. Set the timer, so he knows there is an end when the timer beeps. You might return to the bathroom every fifteen minutes or so to give ample opportunity for success. Again, there's no pressure to perform. Just try. When the time is up, your child is done with that training session.

In another approach, some parents bring a stack of books and toys into the bathroom with a jug of water and spend the day. The child wears nothing from the waist down so that as soon as he starts going, he sees what is happening and begins to make a connection with the feeling in his body. This lets him know when to head to the potty. If this is your plan, explain that you'll spend the day in "potty camp." You'll play some games, read books, and sing songs, but the goal is to learn when to go to the potty.

A number of children's books put the potty training process into story form. Reading a few of these with your child can provide understanding of what you expect. These also provide great examples of how to explain the process and ways to affirm along the way.

Make the experience as positive yet as low-key as you

can. Your child will need to spend some time just sitting, not the favorite for most toddlers. Whether you keep a stack of books reserved for potty time, play clapping games, or sing songs, do whatever you can do to help the time pass pleasantly to increase cooperation. You may want to use some kind of incentive or reward such as frozen blueberries for sitting but that may be unnecessary. Offering five M&Ms, a small toy from a grab bag, or a Silly Band may be helpful for increasing cooperation, but often the whole reward idea is overrated. When children are actually successful, the internal reward is often enough to excite them to try again. Furthermore, toddlers love their parents' undivided attention. This may be the best incentive for ultimate success.

Since bowel control is often a hurdle that's a bit more difficult you might want to wait and use the rewards then. However, sometimes the internal reward of being a big girl or big boy is enough to get things moving—literally.

All children are different. You'll want to read your toddler's temperament and signals. You'll discern how to convey concepts in a language that makes sense to both of you. You'll figure out how to work together through a difficult task. Your goal is to have a coaching attitude, instead of a policeman attitude with your child.

Just remember that "mistakes" are part of the process. Use that time to communicate mercy and grace. Your frustration or disappointment isn't helpful. This is a time when you might focus on the mercy and grace that God provides each of us as adults.

The whole of Psalm 86 is great to read during potty training times to catch the heart of God. For the sake of space, here are verses 5-7, "You are forgiving and good,

O LORD, abounding in love to all who call to you. Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy. In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.”

When children make mistakes they need mercy and encouragement, not punishment. Your positive attitude during this developmental milestone can go a long way to emulate the grace of God for your child even at this young age.

Choosing the Right Childcare Solution

Finding a sitter—the great parent challenge. Whether both parents plan to return to work full-time or simply need a babysitter for an occasional night out, parents have valid concerns about who will care for their child while they're away. This chapter focuses on childcare during working hours. The next focuses on how to choose a babysitter for the occasional night out.

In choosing childcare, fantasy must meet reality. If the wonderful nurturing friend has no back-up for when she's ill, if Grandma fits your budget yet tends to watch television more than caring for your child, or if work offers convenient on-site day care but the crowded rooms provide little nurturing, you'll be frustrated if you try to force a fit where essential elements are in conflict. While no situation will be perfect, be honest with yourself and potential caregivers about what matters most in order to ensure the best fit from the beginning. Here are some considerations.

Time and money are both baseline essentials. First, focus on time. Do you need full-time, part-time, or occasional

care? Will the hours be fixed or changing? If considering a day care center, do the center's hours match yours? Do they charge extra for late pick-up? (Most do.) Do they allow part-time usage? Are those days fixed or flexible? If considering a mom in the neighborhood, ask these same questions plus explore additional questions such as what happens if she's ill? What happens if your child is ill?

Second, consider money. Recognize that childcare is a major budget item. This person will heavily influence your child as well as take sole responsibility for nurture and safety in your absence. It's not a place to skimp. Yet, the price must be within your means. Take the time to explore the variety of childcare settings in your area to determine which options, including the occasional extra charges for late-fees, field trips, and vacations, fit for you. You might also calculate whether the cost of childcare plus the wardrobe, travel, and higher tax brackets related to working translates into actually bringing more money home. If income is your reason for working, you may find more financial benefit by being home and developing some kind of home business.

Once you've found options that work with your hours and within your budget, you have a few more choices to consider. Is the caregiver welcoming and nurturing? Look for how she engages your child and how she talks to other children. Does she know about, either formally or informally, developmental stages and how to nurture each stage?

Ask about the typical day to discern whether there is a general routine for the day that allows for predictability, needed rest, and nurturing activities. Within the activities, is there a balance between active play and quiet play, between academic, physical, and creative time. Are age-appropriate toys available? Does she ask about your routine to accom-

moderate activities important to you? Are you comfortable with the use of movies and television? What kinds of meals and snacks are provided? Is the care area clean? Does it meet safety standards (i.e., outlets have plugs, stairs have gates, cleaners and breakables are out of reach)?

How does the caregiver handle misbehavior? Are you comfortable with her tone, process, and consequences? What is the policy on toilet training? How are accidents handled? Is there an area for outdoor play and does it have mulching or some other safe surface under the play equipment? Does it have shade and how are children contained?

How does the caregiver handle emergencies? Sicknesses? This is relevant both for planning for your own child and to know the kinds of illnesses to which your child may be exposed.

Most day care centers do background checks on employees but you might want to ask to make sure. If you consider a private individual, you'll want to ask for a background check as well.

Finally, does the caregiver or center share your faith values? As the caregiver interacts with your child, will she teach lessons that promote those values or conflict with them? Deuteronomy 6:6 urges parents to teach the ways of God to their children, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." God designed children to learn life's lessons in the ordinary comings and goings of the day. Thus, this is where we must also teach the faith. If the majority of

your child's daily experiences are with another caregiver, you'll want to make sure the teaching is what you'd do if you were there.

Essentially you want to evaluate whether the daily interactions between this caregiver and your child will mesh with your own. Does she engage your child, offer a setting that nurtures, and support your goals with her care? If you consider a daycare center, look not only at the person who will immediately care for your child, but also at the caregivers your child will encounter as he moves to other rooms.

It's always important to continue active interaction with the caregiver or center. Keep dialogue active. Plan regular sit-down meetings to discuss your child's participation, your expectations, and your caregiver's expectations.

Visit the site frequently to assess whether the actual care meets your perception. You may also get cues from your child. Does he talk about his experiences with enthusiasm? Does he look forward to activities? Does he have a bond with his caregiver?

Though no one can take your place, you and the caregiver form a partnership for raising your child. Be prepared for the significant influence this person will have on your child and choose the situation that best meshes with your desires. Continually monitor the situation to ensure it remains the best fit for all. Keep communication open so that you can respond to the caregiver's concerns as well as ask her to respond to yours. With careful decisions up front, fretting gives way to confidence as you enter a joint venture to raise your child.



Choosing the Right Babysitter

Choosing a babysitter, even to watch children for a short time, generates anxiety for parents. This person will be responsible for the welfare and security of your child. How do you decide whom to trust?

The likely contenders for an occasional babysitter are your own relatives or responsible teens that you've already gotten to know from church or from the neighborhood.

With relatives, the comfort is that you know them well, both their strengths and their weaknesses. If the weaknesses are within tolerable limits and the strengths focus on care for your little ones, the security of trusting the sitter and the knowledge that they love your child nearly as much as you do can be invaluable. To determine whether extended family offer a good fit, focus on those elements most critical to you and honestly evaluate whether the family members will be able to meet those desires.

God designed extended family to be a source of training for children. About the value of grandparents, Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them.” Having your children cared for by people who love them and who can offer training is a great asset.

Here are some questions to consider as you choose someone to spend time with your kids. Do they listen to and honor your preferences on the big issues? While grandparents may claim the right to be more indulgent, do they largely honor what you’re teaching your children, whether that’s no snacks before bed, your choices in television programming, or methods of disciplining misbehavior. Are they comfortable with small children? Do they have the physical ability to care for children and the stamina to keep up? Do they pay attention to your children by engaging them in activities? If extended family willingly take your children and largely honor your desires, you enjoy the blessing of a secure place to send your kids when you need to get away while your children enjoy quality time with others who love them.

Remember to express gratefulness for the care that family members provide. Because they don’t usually charge for babysitting, many young couples may take this gift for granted. Your family is giving up their free time to help you. You’re saving valuable dollars plus the hassle and anxiety of finding someone trustworthy. While family often enjoy their time with grandchildren, nieces, or nephews, don’t lose sight of the gift side of the arrangement and be careful to not take advantage.

If no family is available, neighborhood teens often become the best option. In larger families, older children learn to care for little ones by watching and helping their parents. With the rise of smaller families, this natural training has been diminished. Thus, just being a teen doesn’t

qualify your neighbor as babysitter. The test is, “Do they know how to care for children and are they mature enough to be in charge?”

When considering a babysitter, ask whether she has attended a safe-sitter course, cared for younger siblings, or volunteered in a children's program. Ask what she'd do in very specific situations: “How would you calm a crying child? What activities do you plan for your time with the children? What would you do if Bobby hit Jason?” While she may not have answers to every question, a completely blank stare might be a sign to keep looking. If she seems promising but untrained, arrange for her to watch your children while you work around the house or to go with you on errands. She will learn how to interact in a way that fits your family, gain insight from you into ways to handle various situations, and your children will see you transferring authority to her.

It's usually helpful to take the time to seek references especially if hiring someone outside the family. Check with others who have used the same sitter. Ask both what they liked and what they'd change if they could. If they note that the sitter leaves the house a wreck but the children love her and can't wait for their next date, you gain real insight into the situation you'll face and whether it fits your needs. You might also consider getting a criminal background check for anyone who will spend time with your family.

Be ready to compensate your babysitter fairly. Couples need to get away to nurture their relationship. Often the biggest hindrance is finding a babysitter they can trust and then finding a way to pay her. It can be tempting to skimp on the babysitter. Yet you don't want the sitter to skimp

on your children's care. So, treat the sitter money as an investment in your marriage. The babysitter is guaranteed to be cheaper than counseling, and the evening with your spouse far more fun. Set this as a budget item, and find other things to skip in order to put money in the sitter fund.

Check with friends to find the going rate, but amounts can vary widely. You don't have to be the top bidder. You simply want to pay the sitter the amount she sees as fair. Most sitters will tell you their rates when you call. If she doesn't have a set fee, offer what you can afford and ask if it's fair in her eyes.

If you have family or friends who babysit for free, find a way to thank them for caring for your children. Occasionally give a gift card for a meal out or do a chore for them. Though they love your children, this occasional gift also affirms how much you appreciate their help to you.

Finding a sitter can be a difficult challenge to face. Yet the right groundwork and your instincts can lead you to a sitter that's as good as gold. Once you have someone you can trust, you're free to reconnect with your spouse or occasionally run errands without fighting strollers and car seats. Your children often enjoy the time with someone they see as a giant playmate. The security of a good babysitter allows you to enjoy small breaks and return ready to enjoy your little ones even more.



Preparing for the New Baby

When a new baby enters the family, parents often take an approach with toddlers that extols the virtues of the baby, then are surprised when the toddler isn't as thrilled as they expect. No matter how you slice it, the toddler often feels like he's being replaced.

Toddlers experience life events through very egocentric eyes. Intellectual development thus far has focused on learning self-expression, body control, and taking in life. The reference point is self and what impact life events have. It's hard to conceive of others' needs or reactions at this stage. The time frame is immediate. Your child has no ability to imagine beyond what's experienced now. Thus, your toddler will need you to walk through the transition to a new baby. Both positive and negative adjustments will take place, and you can help make this transition easier for your toddler.

Focus on developing a sense of security with your child before the new baby arrives. Your toddler needs assurance that the special place in your home and heart are still there. Children's reactions to a new sibling range from thrilled to mortified, often within the same child on the same day.

Rather than trying to control your child's reaction, focus on yours. Share your excitement about how your family is growing and the opportunities for each of you to both love and be loved by the new baby. Answer your child's questions as they arise. Continue to affirm what you love about your toddler, encourage developing skills, and spend extra time reinforcing your support and love. As you keep the normal routine your child will be assured of a special place in your heart even amidst the changes that are taking place.

If the pregnancy is stressful, chances are your toddler will detect even unspoken stress that increases feelings of insecurity. To the extent you can, offer your child a general understanding of the issues. If Mom is on bed rest, let your child know that Mommy needs more rest because she doesn't feel well. Then, give your toddler a way to help such as carrying water to Mom. This gives your toddler some control in an unknown situation and eases insecurity. Toddlers are extremely protective of parents, so avoid phrases such as "because of the baby." Instead, keep the explanation more general. This provides a reason for the stress and will lower the anxiety without developing resentment.

Finally, avoid actions that might make your child feel as if she's losing her place. If you must move her to a bed to make a crib available for the baby, do this early on and make the move about her getting a big bed. Create a special area for her before you begin creating a nursery for the baby. Include her as you decorate the baby's area. The more she contributes, the more the new baby will feel like an addition to the family rather than simply a new baby for Mom and Dad.

When Dad brings your toddler to the hospital to meet the new baby, have him call Mom's room to let her know they're coming. She can put the baby in the bassinette and have her hands free to welcome the toddler. This first impression of mom's arms and lap available to include your toddler eases the transition. Also, you may want to have a small gift waiting for your child from the new sibling. Nothing paves the way toward a good relationship like a gift.

Before going to the hospital, specifically tell your toddler that Mommy and baby will need to stay at the hospital for a few days. Knowing this keeps your toddler from wondering why Mom is staying with the new baby instead of coming home. Be prepared. One family who emphasized that Mom would have to stay in the hospital was shocked when their toddler began sobbing because his new baby sister couldn't come home. They hadn't realized how attached he had become to the new baby as he watched his mom's belly expand. He was ready to let Mom stay but not both of them.

Once home, Mom and Dad will cuddle, coo, and fall in love with their new baby. That's normal and good. Remember, though, to reserve energy to cuddle, read, and spend time alone with your toddler. Life will change and your toddler needs to adjust. In fact, the arrival of a sibling often forces older children to move to a new level in a healthy way. So long as your toddler continues to feel secure and significant, she'll likely love the baby as much as you do with her special sister-love. Should she regress with symptoms such as refusing to use the potty, asking for a pacifier, or starting to use baby talk, be patient. Offer affirmation for the skills she has and tie privileges to that advanced stage. For example, he gets to help Dad make dinner be-

cause he's such a big boy. With affirmation for his special place, he'll bounce back to his old self.

Growing up is a process that requires changes in the way a child thinks. James 1:4 talks about the fact that maturity develops over time, emphasizing perseverance as the key. It says, "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Over time, children too develop maturity but the process often requires that they learn how to perceive situations differently. It's your toddler's perseverance encouraged by you that provides a different way to think about life situations. Your loving patience can go a long way in helping your child to grow in understanding of what a family is.

As God knits children in their mother's womb, he designs not only the child, but also the family. You were designed to be the perfect parents to each of your children; your toddler was designed to be the older sibling to this baby. As you seek God's direction for raising your toddler, specifically ask him to guide you in using this experience as part of training for his purposes in your child's life. As you follow his leading, your toddler will gain an assurance of the special role held in your family, not only as your child but also as an older sibling.



A Spiritual Milestone

As the parent of a young toddler, you may believe that the churchy stuff needs to wait until your child is older and can comprehend more. While in-depth discussions of the nature of baptism or the role of the Holy Spirit probably should wait, these years are the perfect time to lay the foundation for faith. Your toddler is a sponge soaking up the world around. While your child may not consciously remember everything you say, it all enters the head and heart and forms the foundation for development. Because what's learned at this stage will form a frame of reference, it's imperative that Christian parents take the initiative to teach and model Christ's truths. Fortunately, you don't have to be a biblical scholar to do so.

Toddlers learn from their everyday experiences. The fundamental impressions of God are formed by the daily interactions from relationships with parents. Focus on creating a relationship of unconditional love, acceptance, patience with imperfection, support of the unique aspects of your child's personality, and mercy with misbehavior, and your child will view God as loving, accepting, patient, and merciful. When you set a standard and enforce it, you

create the impression that God is just. When you sing, dance, and laugh out loud, you create the impression that God is joyful. Choose to react to your child as the Bible teaches that God reacts to you, and you'll teach the truths of the nature of God.

Take time to tell Bible stories to your child. We would suggest that sometime during the toddler years that you give your child his first Bible. In fact, we suggest that you identify several spiritual milestones along the way during childhood. You might use a child's dedication to mark infancy, a first Bible during the toddler years, memorize several verses of scripture in the preschool years, and so on.

A good children's Bible offers colorful illustrations to fill a child's visual appetite as you read the truths of scripture. The National Center for Biblical Parenting offers age-appropriate Bibles for each stage including one for toddlers (www.biblicalparenting.org). Establish a pattern of beginning the morning or ending the evening reading the Bible to your child. You pass on truth to your child on a regular basis and create the habit of seeking scripture as part of the daily pattern of life.

Since children learn through activity, take time to act out the Bible story or provide some game that corresponds to it. If you just read the story of Noah you might want to get a large cardboard box and turn it into an ark with stuffed animals all around as the guests in Noah's boat. Children learn best through activity, and when you teach your children using their own language you'll be like Jesus. Remember that when Christ taught the disciples he used parables. You can do the same thing with your child if you combine truth with activity. Take time to act out or

play with each Bible story you tell to your young child.

Look for other tools to teach your child. If your child attends Sunday school, use the parent pages that come home to reinforce the lessons. Crafts, prayers, and memory verse activities designed for your child's stage grab attention and keep continuity between lessons.

You are the primary spiritual teacher of your child. The church is only a support for your work at home. When you're actively engaged in teaching your children spiritual truths, they'll recognize that you're the person to go to with questions about life. That's how God designed it.

Joshua 4:6-7 reveals one of the ways God would have parents pass on the faith to their kids using past events and memories, and telling stories of what God has done. "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

You have many stories of God's grace revealed to you in your life. Some of those have tangible reminders in the form of pictures, ornaments, and physical objects. Your house and the activities within it provide plenty of faith lessons for children that will help form their understanding of spiritual things. Of course there are various video and audio recordings that bring Bible stories and their lessons to life. Invest in a library of these and your child will learn the wisdom of Moses, the faithfulness of Abraham, and the courage of Esther as you run errands.

Take time to sing songs with your toddler. We tend to remember the songs we learned as children. Fill your home with songs of scripture and songs of praise, and your child

will absorb the truths of God and sing along. The songs learned at this developmental stage penetrate the mind deeply and feed growing thoughts for the rest of life. Sing of God's love to your child, and you'll lay the foundation for an understanding of God at the most primal level. Many Christian artists have created age-appropriate music for children. You can give your kids hours of songs to fill a long car trip with God's truth using music even adults enjoy.

The age-old children's song is rich in theological truth. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong; they are weak but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so." In this song your child learns that Jesus' love is personal. Your child learns that the Bible is the source of truth, that even in our weakness God is strong. Over the course of your child's life you'll add details, but for now, this is a great way to start.

And Now an Important Safety Reminder...

Mary refilled Jillian's coffee cup and grabbed a second plate of scones as Jillian finished the latest installment of her ongoing adventures with the new puppy. As the women laughed together, it dawned on Mary that she hadn't checked on Josie in a while. "It's too quiet, I need to find Josie."

As Mary dashed toward her bedroom, Josie came toddling out the door. Horrified, Mary saw Josie's mouth covered in red. A split-second after she scooped Josie into her arms, Mary recognized her favorite shade of lip-gloss. As relief flooded over her, Mary carried Josie to the bathroom to wash her face. Open containers of lotion, toothpaste, and powder littered the counter, evidence of Josie's exploration running down the sides of the vanity.

"I didn't even know she could reach the counter much less the cabinets," Mary explained when Josie was washed and safely tucked in for nap. "I thought I had everything out of reach. I have some work to do."

Toddlers delight in exploring their world. Newfound

motor skills come in handy for going wherever they long to go, be it cruising up the stairs, dashing outside, or climbing cabinets. Parents face the challenge of promoting exploration while keeping their little explorer safe.

It's certain that the greatest advice for the exploring toddler is to have constant supervision. Toddlers can't remember sets of rules nor can they understand cause and effect. Therefore, they are incapable of protecting themselves. Parents must protect, which means being continually vigilant. Your toddler is only safe out of your sight if she's confined to a playpen or in a predetermined safe zone. Sure, there are steps that make your home and yard safer, but toddlers have a homing instinct for the one overlooked pair of scissors or uncapped bottle. Only by keeping your toddler in view can you monitor activity and head off danger.

While you're doing all you can to protect your child from danger, remember that God is working on the same solution with you as well. Matthew 18:10 says, "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." According to Jesus, God has assigned angels to children and it's a good thing he does. Many parents have experienced first-hand accounts of near misses and miraculous escapes resulting in instant thanks to God for his protection.

Even though God is watching out for your child, you'll want to keep a close eye on safety as well, so here are a few reminders. Many of these you already know but it's important to double-check yourself every once in a while to make sure you haven't let your guard down in important safety areas.

As you're looking at your own home from a curious toddler's perspective you'll come to particularly dangerous places. It's best to keep medicine cabinets, the garage, cleaning supplies, and other hazards carefully locked. Speed, agility, and unswerving dedication often prompt a toddler's attempt to access cabinets that may otherwise seem hard to reach. Any substance that poses serious risk to your child's health should be under lock and key. Kitchen and bathroom cleaners, bleach, gasoline, aspirin, matches, and prescription drugs are all deadly. Put these in a locked cabinet or one with childproof handles. Additionally, post the number of your local poison control center on the fridge or by your telephone should your child breach your defenses. Should you need to make a call, have the bottle in hand to read information to the operator so she can offer the most accurate intervention.

One dad reported that he and his wife were awakened on Saturday morning as their toddler joined them in their bed. They noticed that he had a strange orange smell on his breath. They jumped up and went to the kitchen and found the empty baby aspirin bottle on the counter. To their horror their toddler had pushed a chair over to the counter, climbed up, accessed the upper cabinet, and eaten all the pills in the bottle. They called poison control who sent them to the hospital immediately where they induced vomiting.

While getting into substances poses one type of risk, another is a toddler's propensity for climbing. Not only can kids get hurt but their desire to use your furniture as a jungle gym can put them at risk of furniture falling on them. Check all cabinets, bookshelves, tables, stoves, etc. to ensure they sit firmly stable. Anchor them securely to

ensure they don't fall. Likewise check furniture for sharp corners and cover them if necessary.

While checking furniture also check windows to ensure cords, especially near a crib, are securely tied to avoid strangulation. Move cribs away from windows or securely lock them to prevent your toddler from climbing or falling through.

Known in the legal arena as an attractive nuisance for its irresistible draw, water poses one of the greatest dangers to your toddler. The bucket of water you use to mop the floor seems safe, yet a head-heavy toddler pulling up on the side can easily tip into it and be unable to get out. Despite the strongest warnings, your toddler will head toward the backyard kiddie pool whenever possible. A bathtub with even two inches of water can be dangerous. Water attracts. Therefore, parents must monitor any water not contained in a sippy cup.

Toddlers ingeniously find their way to the great outdoors, so to protect them, install high locks, childproof covers for door handles, or alarms to let you know your darling has made it outside. Make sure that outdoor play areas are safe with sufficient mulch, pea gravel, or other ground cover under play equipment to buffer falls. Keep the yard free from tools, gardening implements, or lawn equipment. Finally, always check carefully for your child before moving your vehicle. High-sitting SUVs and vans provide great visibility for the driver except of a young child standing directly behind the car.

You might want to create a checklist to diminish dangers. Add to the list as you discover your own child's most inventive ways to court danger. Remember, along with God's oversight, your supervision is the surest protection.

Because you can't predict everything, constant monitoring allows you to guide exploration so that discovery remains safe.



Understanding the “Preferred Parent” Dilemma

Laura carried the dishes to the sink while Jonas wiped Carrie’s face and started to lift her from her chair. Screams erupted. “I want Mommy!” Sighing, Jonas took the dishes from Laura so she could attend to their daughter yet again.

Jenny looked around the daycare playroom trying to catch sight of her son. “Jack, I’m here!” she called. Jack ducked into the playhouse. Peeking in the tiny door Jenny said, “Jack, come out so we can go home.”

“I want Daddy.” Arms crossed and face set, Jack relayed the clear message he wasn’t budging until Dad came.

Most children will go through periods of time where they prefer one parent over the other. Children sometimes grow out of the preference or switch to preferring the other parent over time. Overall, both parents generally feel included in their child’s affections and enjoy their turn as the favored one. However, sometimes the preference is so dramatic that the out-parent has a hard time successfully interacting with the child. The dynamics that ensue can

often be hurtful as the parent feels a sense of rejection. Moreover, the relational politics can turn the most routine interactions into raging battles. What can parents do?

To start with, it's important to schedule one-on-one time with the non-preferred parent. Life situations can set your child up to prefer one parent over the other. If one parent stays home while the other works, the child may prefer the at-home parent out of sheer familiarity, especially if the working parent's job requires extra-long hours or much travel. Personality or physical traits can attract a child toward a particular parent as well.

In one family the young boy so dramatically preferred Dad that Mom noted, "If Dad could nurse, I'd never get to hold him." They later discovered that their son had a sensory integration issue and that Dad's deep voice proved calming while Mom's higher voice was harder on their son's ears. An overly rambunctious parent with a quieter child, a serious parent with a playful child, or a shy parent with a shy child are examples of personality combinations that add to the challenge.

If you experience any of this, it's important to remember that relationships develop as people spend time together. The same thing is true in your own relationship with the Lord. Revelation 3:20 is a call to Christians for closeness with God. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." God delights in spending time with us and asks us to make that a priority in our lives because time spent together increases relationship.

The non-preferred parent needs to have regular, one-on-one time with the child where each learns how to

respond to the other and bonds are developed. As your ability to respond to your child's cues improves through the trial-and-error of being together, the child's confidence often increases. Offer consistent overtures and refuse to give up when your child backtracks. Regular positive interaction helps the relationship to develop. You may even enjoy the surprise of a day where your child chooses you first.

If a child prefers you to the other parent it might be helpful for you to monitor your own cues. Do some excruciatingly honest self-assessment to ensure you aren't unintentionally rewarding the preference. Understandably, if your child is crying, seems afraid, or simply won't cooperate with the other parent, it seems easier to just take over. Furthermore, it may seem to border on cruelty to insist that your child allow the other parent to help when you're standing right there. Yet your rush to appease your toddler may reinforce whatever subtle thought patterns led to a preference in the first place.

Further, sometimes parents are uncomfortable with their spouse's parenting style and they intervene and take the child away when their spouse roughhouses instead of gently cuddling, or they take over feeding at the first sign of clumsiness. These parents sometimes unintentionally take the upper hand in parenting and thereby make their spouses feel inept, a self-consciousness that toddlers perceive and react to. If you give in to a tantrum when your spouse is trying to hold the line or if your toddler gets his way by clinging to you instead of doing what the other parent says, favoritism often develops.

Absolutely critical to a healthy family is the foundational belief between parents that you're a team created by

God to raise your children. God blended the personalities, strengths, and weaknesses of the two of you to create the optimal skill-set for parenting the little ones he placed in your family. Though you and your spouse may approach parenting very differently and have widely varying levels of comfort with different aspects of parenting, your differences often provide the best parenting-blend for your toddler. If you are in any way undercutting your toddler's confidence in or bonding with your spouse, you need to find a way to overtly affirm your spouse's parenting in your toddler's eyes.

If Daddy is tossing Jaimie in the air and she screams for you with terror in her eyes, pause before you react. If Daddy is genuinely trying to play with Jaimie and you know he's not going to let her drop, your best response may be to say, "Honey, Daddy's got you. Have fun!" Then, walk away. As the favored parent, your confidence in your spouse speaks volumes to your child.

Sometimes you'll just want to communicate in clear terms which parent is in charge and that there aren't any other choices this time. If Dad's preparing lunch then he's in charge. You aren't going to make a switch just because the child doesn't like the leadership choice. Or if Mom is putting her son to bed and he cries for Daddy, it may be appropriate to say, "Mommy is putting you to bed tonight," and continue on. Some parents are too quick to give in to a child who may be developing a form of demandingness or the desire to control more than is appropriate.

It's not wrong to meet the desires of your toddler, but you'll want to be quick to discern whether your graciousness is becoming an arena for selfishness to grow. It's not just a single incident you're looking for. Watch for patterns.

Trying to discern the inner workings of your toddler's reasoning can be a Herculean task, yet the effort often pays off. When your little one first started showing a preference, what was going on? Did dad become the favorite after mom was ill for months? Was mother-in-law providing care and exhibiting a strong preference for her son over daughter-in-law? Did mom's work hours increase dramatically? If there is a discernible origin for the preference, understanding the surrounding factors may point to a strategy for equalizing your child's preferences.

Now that Mom is healthy she may need to set aside other tasks to focus on reconnecting with her toddler. Dad may need to tell his mom to nix the derogatory comments about her daughter-in-law. Mom may need to develop a strategy to reserve energy for her toddler. She may even need to specifically reassure her toddler that her child didn't do anything wrong to cause Mom to be gone longer.

Dramatic preferences not only hurt the non-preferred parent's feelings, but they also hinder a healthy relationship. Finding ways to balance the preferences fills the parents' emotional needs to connect with their child and strengthens the family.



How to Survive the Piranha Hour

The hours between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. tend to be the hardest of the day. Tired, hungry children melt down as tired, hungry parents juggle making dinner, completing end-of-day chores, and handling ongoing care for toddlers. Parents who have been home with toddlers may be “all funned out.” Parents who have been away at work often find it difficult to transition from work pressures to home pressures. The result is a tensioned-filled, hectic period of time instead of the cozy home life most crave. Some parents feel like everyone and everything wants a piece of them, like a school of piranha attacking its victim.

The piranha hour comes when needs are high and resources are low. Hungry people, cluttered houses, and attention-craving children combine with a myriad of chores at the same time parents' energy, patience, and motivation ebb. This combination creates tension and sometimes even chaos. If both parents have been away at work, then the pressure is exponential as both transition from work mode to focusing on each other and on the children.

Knowing this hour is coming enables you to plan ahead. Look for ways to reserve resources for this challeng-

ing time of the day. Parents should work together to create a plan for addressing all the different activities that will happen from dinnertime to bedtime and how to reserve the energy, attention, and patience to get through them.

If you're the parent who is at home with your child then you'll want to plan ahead and be ready for the challenges that are on their way. No one has to tell you that days with toddlers are exhausting. The constant attention required to supervise, train, and interact with young children is a challenge for anyone.

Look for ways to replenish your energy during the day. For those who are energized by being with people, invite a friend over and enjoy the relational benefits that provide encouragement for you. Find ways to connect. Invite other friends over for coffee, take trips to the park with your toddler, or join a Bible study that allows for time to be with others in order to fill the tank that may be draining.

If being alone energizes you, then enjoy the naptime by taking a nap yourself. Or read a book, walk on the treadmill, practice your musical instrument, or get some much-needed work done. Energy management during the day can help you later as you face the increased demands of the hours to come.

Be careful not to "dump" the children on the parent who has been gone during the day. You may understandably feel like, "I've had them all day. Now it's your turn!" Yet, this fails to recognize that the parent at work has had stress as well. Furthermore, though hard to believe, being with children often makes it easier to be with children. You find your rhythm, read their communication, and understand their mood simply from being with them. The parent who has been gone misses all this. Consider a swimming

pool. The at-home parent has been in the water all day and is used to the temperature. The away parent is plunging into the cold water, a tough transition.

Instead, view the day as a marathon with the finish line about thirty minutes after the away parent gets home. Allow that parent to ease into home life. Catch them up on events from the day. Allow a transition from work to home. Just providing a half hour transition as a parent returns home can often make things run more smoothly as you get back to other demands that need to get done.

If both parents are away during the day, take time to check in with each other and create a plan for the evening. Just knowing your spouse was badgered by a boss, or that meetings may run late, allows you to adjust to each other for your arrival at home. Also, you need to be ready for the transition from the work world to the toddler world. Mentally and physically reserve some of your best for when you get home.

If you're the spouse coming home from a day at work, realize the stress the at-home parent has experienced. Though your work may be demanding and stressful, you at least have co-workers to share the load. Often, at-home parents face lonely days. Rather than expecting to go home to "relax, let down, and be served," go home to serve your family. Find ways to recharge yourself so you have the energy to do so. Whether you stop by the gym, take a walk, or simply listen to your favorite music during the commute, purposely recharging so you can meet needs at home will help.

Here's a tip for dads or moms who are returning home from work to reengage with family life. On the way home, close to your neighborhood, find a fixed landmark where

each day you symbolically dump all the trash from your time away and ask God for renewed energy for what you're about to experience at home. Don't wait until you walk in the door to drop your briefcase and long for some rest. That's a recipe for demandingness and frustration for all. Take care of your needs before you open the door, and enter the house ready to go to work.

Call during the day. If you check in with your family during the day, you'll be aware when your toddler missed the potty six times, has engaged in a battle of wills all day, or is running a fever and fussy. Knowing the situation at home helps you prepare for how you might be needed.

It's never helpful to reenter your home, see chaos, and ask, "What did you do all day?" The at-home parent needs your support, not criticism. Moreover, your absence has left a gap, and your family has missed you all day. If you realize that your family wants you home with them, you'll be motivated to be fully present once you cross the threshold, looking for ways to clean up or give your spouse a break.

It's all about partnership. In the Bible God gives instructions about how his family, the church, can be successful. He says in Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Furthermore, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 reminds us that "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" Parents need each other and partnering together is the best way to get through the piranha hour in any home. Working together, spouses find ways to support each other, reserve energy for the phase, and turn the end of the day into a cozy, family time.

The Only Green Foods My Toddler Eats are M&Ms

When planning meals, parents of toddlers must strike a delicate balance between forming healthy eating habits and making mealtimes a pleasant social experience. Because toddlers are forming their foundational understanding of the world during this stage, establishing a healthy diet can shape a lifetime of health. The risks are real. Obesity in children and adults is on the rise. Obese children can even have early symptoms of cardiovascular disease. The number one cause of obesity is a poor diet, and dietary habits take root during the early years.

At the same time, a toddler's tastes vary greatly from adult tastes. Children often must develop their palates before they can enjoy healthier foods. Forcing children to eat things they despise rarely leads to an appreciation of those foods. Instead, you may permanently turn them off to something they'd come to appreciate if taste were allowed to develop naturally. Here are some tips for establishing some healthy routines regarding food.

Keep in mind that toddlers physically experience

growth spurts and then plateaus. Their appetite corresponds to those developmental changes. Some toddlers need very little food for weeks or months at a time and trying to treat them as if they need more doesn't help. On the other hand, many of these young children tend to eat food five or six times a day instead of an adult dose of three meals. Morning, afternoon, and evening snacks are often necessary to keep a toddler's appetite curbed.

One of the good things you have going for you is hunger, prompting your child to want to eat, so the motivation to eat is rarely a problem. You can use that need to your advantage. By simply offering healthy snacks and meal choices you can guide your child to eat a more healthy diet and ignore the lack of desire at other times. Although a child may refuse vegetables at a meal, offering only raw carrots or cucumbers with dip as a snack may provide the solution for getting those nutrients.

Some children fill up on cookies or crackers for snack and then aren't interested in a meal. Instead, you might want to offer cut-up fruit as a snack and other healthy choices so that if your child doesn't want the meal offered, you don't have to be overly concerned. Include options from all the basic food groups at each meal and focus on fruits or veggies for snacks. Unless there's a huge conspiracy in hospital nurseries, toddlers don't know about potato chips, cookies, or gummy bears. If you keep these as a treat when you visit the zoo, go on a picnic, or the occasional snack, rather than a routine part of each meal, your child will only view them as special.

Offer a range of healthy choices at meals and for snacks. Focus on whether your child is getting some balance over the course of the week rather than focusing on a specific

food at a particular meal. Even if your daughter didn't get Tuesday's vegetables because she didn't eat her carrots, but she ate all her green beans on Monday and both corn and peas on Wednesday, she'll do fine. As you focus on offering healthy choices rather than forcing your child to eat a particular food, you lessen the tendency for battles at mealtime.

Because of ongoing brain development, toddlers need a higher-fat diet than adults. If you eat low-fat yogurt for example, offer your toddler the higher-fat version. The same is true with milk.

Introduce new foods multiple times and in small amounts. Toddlers often must try something three to five times before developing a taste for it. Put a baby spoonful of a new food on the plate alongside known favorites. If they ask for more, you celebrate wildly. If they taste and reject, the smaller amount makes less of an impression the next time you try the food. Wait several days, and then introduce it again. Keep everything low-key and you'll increase the probability that your toddler will be more open to new foods.

Be aware of sensory issues. Often rejection of food has more to do with the texture than the taste. If your toddler doesn't enjoy "slimy" foods such as oatmeal or cooked spinach, you might try substituting muesli or raw spinach to keep healthy options without the texture issues. Other foods that may cause issues include rubbery foods, sticky foods, or foods with strong smells. If your toddler rejects a variety of foods, check to see if they share similar textures. You may find more success if you focus on a different option.

Parents often worry too much about their children's eat-

ing habits, resulting in mealtimes filled with tension and discipline. Make mealtimes a family affair. Keep the focus on fellowship rather than on food. Something about food and conversation binds people together. In your desire to help your toddler eat healthy, don't miss the opportunity for great bonding. When you emphasize fellowship, you'll build family bonds and create an atmosphere conducive to your toddler engaging in conversation plus food exploration.

Throughout his word God guides the eating habits of his people, suggesting it's right and good for parents to focus on this area as well. In just one example, Daniel's commitment to the eating habits he learned from God led to such health that he was elevated to a position of leadership. In Daniel 1:8 it says, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." The food choices for Daniel had spiritual ramifications because they were a reflection on God's instructions to his people. Apparently his early training formed some good habits and he took them with him wherever he went.

While you may not be able to guarantee that your child becomes a ruler of the land because of diet choices, you can develop healthy eating patterns in the early years. These encourage children both to enjoy better physical health and to value the importance of making healthy choices in all areas. At the same time, your child isn't fully formed during the toddler years. Kids have an entire childhood to develop, so don't over-stress about whether your child is eating enough at the very beginning. If you continue to focus on offering healthy foods and creating a healthy lifestyle, eventually your child will eat the broccoli and spinach—along with the green M&Ms and Skittles.



When to Call the Doctor

José wakes to the sound of Becki crying. The clock says 2:00 am. José finds Becki throwing up. As he picks her up, he feels a burning forehead. Questions loom in José's mind about whether this is one of those times he can work on this problem alone or should he get a professional involved?

One of the scariest, most confusing questions parents face is whether we should call a doctor. Hard during the day, nighttime makes the question a nightmare as parents vacillate between feeling guilty for potentially bothering a physician without reason and worrying that they may endanger their child by not seeking help in time. Every parent has to make the best call for the situation. Here are some guidelines.

First of all, when in doubt, make the phone call. If you simply aren't sure whether your child needs immediate care, seek professional advice. Doctors would rather field a call that could have waited until morning than have you wait and your child's health issues escalate for lack of intervention. Over time you'll gain the experience necessary to know which issues you can deal with at home and those

that need additional support. Symptoms can be complicated and the same symptom may be an indication of a variety of different causes. As symptoms develop, new indicators often prompt different concerns. You likely aren't aware of the various possibilities so if something is outside of your comfort zone, get advice.

If you decide to make the call, be prepared with as specific a list of concerns as possible. Use a thermometer to take your child's temperature. Make a list ahead of time with what your child has eaten, had to drink, and how often she or he has thrown up or had diarrhea. Also be prepared to provide the child's age and weight, other relevant symptoms, known allergies or health conditions, and any medications (including herbal or home remedies) you have given.

Here are some symptoms that require immediate attention. Bleeding that can't be stopped. Presumably consumed poison or large amount of medication. A seizure. Trouble breathing. A head injury that caused loss of consciousness, vomiting, or sleepy behavior. Sudden lack of energy or inability to move. Unresponsive or extremely slow in responding. Large cuts or burns. Neck stiffness. Blood in urine or bloody diarrhea. Skin or lips that look blue, purple, or gray. Has object lodged in the nose, ear, or mouth. Crying without tears or has dry mouth without saliva. Dislike of bright lights. Floppy limbs. If any of these occur and you can't reach your pediatrician, then a visit to the emergency room is warranted.

Some symptoms generally don't require that you call your doctor immediately, but if the symptoms persist, a call during regular office hours may be needed. These include a fever over 102 that doesn't respond to medication. Refusal of several feedings in a row. Eyes that are pink,

red, or leaking mucus. Blood-streaked vomit or diarrhea. Lethargic or hard to rouse. Wounds that are red or oozing. Persistent diarrhea or vomiting.

These general guides will help you have a feel for what symptoms call for a doctor and what can wait to see if they improve or get worse. Yet, keep your ears open. As friends or caregivers comment on a particularly bad bug making the rounds, ask whether children needed to be seen by a physician and what the early symptoms included. Read health updates in newsletters sent by your local hospital or in parenting magazines. Purchase a quality medical reference book for children's illnesses that can help evaluate your child's illness by the symptoms and will then give tips on what to do in response. The more educated you become about children's health, the more confident you'll feel when your child is ill.

Most importantly, pray for wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5) God wants us to bring our concerns to him and wants to give us the wisdom we need to parent well. Ask God to make clear to you which symptoms to follow and whether you need more help. God loves helping his children. He'll love helping you through this difficult decision.

Finally, trust your instincts. Though it can be hard to feel we have any instincts (especially with a first child), if in your gut you feel something is wrong with your child, pursue answers. When you leave the doctor's office you should feel that all your concerns were addressed and questions answered. If they aren't and your child's condition continues, seek more help. While most doctors are wonderful and most children enjoy great health, you are your

child's best advocate. If you believe something is wrong, work at finding answers until that feeling is resolved.

By 3:00 am Becki was bathed, medicated, and sleeping. José fell into bed knowing that tomorrow he might have to make time for a doctor's appointment. But, for tonight, he could rest.



Every Child Poses Unique Challenges

Parents often find that their child is much different than they had expected. Before the baby came, there were so many hopes and expectations. Somewhere, something happened that made life a little more difficult. Maybe you envisioned shopping trips with your daughter only to have a tomboy focused on bugs. Or quiet times of reading and discussion but your child has abounding energy that goes beyond cute to annoying. Or maybe your child tends to be whiny and negative, or is overly shy. Invariably children's personalities and differences challenge their parents in one way or another.

All parents can learn from the model of the parent who has a child with special needs. Although your child may not be classified or have an issue requiring some form of special education, you can learn from those parents that do. For example, parents of a child with Down's Syndrome, cerebral palsy, or low functioning autism make major shifts in their lives. They're to be admired for their dramatic change in focus, becoming an advocate for their

child, rearranging their lives, houses, sleeping schedules, and routines to accommodate the need. It's not an option. As tiring or challenging as it is, that's the new course for their lives.

The parent who has a child who is hyperactive, is challenged by fits of rage, or has a speech delay can learn some important lessons. Life needs to change. You'll have to make adjustments, do research, and develop new routines. It's all part of the job of parenting.

In those moments when you realize that your child needs skills and abilities from you that seem outside of your current repertoire, then you need to go back to the Lord and trust that he knows exactly what he's doing. Proverbs 16:9 says, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." God brings every person into a family for a reason. Whether that's through adoption, a blended family, or biologically, God is in control.

In Psalm 139:13 and 16 David praises God by saying, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb... All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Your child's challenges are no accident. There was no random composition of molecules that mistakenly stuck you with a child completely incompatible to you. God knit your child together in the womb. You were designed for your child, and your child was designed for you. If you truly believe in God's sovereignty, then it follows that God purposely gave you this child. Out of his perfect wisdom, his perfect goodness, and his perfect love, he designed this child for you.

Perhaps you have this child because he'll draw out strengths you didn't know you possessed. Perhaps you have this child because he'll cause you to grow in ways

God will use to bless others for the rest of your life. Perhaps you have this child because this child demands what you can't give and will drive you to your knees in absolute dependence on what God alone can provide through you. So often, it's when we can't cope that we, in desperation, turn to God. He miraculously works through us in ways we could never imagine. Perhaps God sent this child, who is so different from what you expected, to induce you to see your need and turn to him.

On a practical level it means that your job as parent will require a lot of prayer, a lot of study, and a lot of work.

If you struggle to parent a child who differs from your expectations, take some time to go before God and pray for your relationship with your child. Take time to thank God for each aspect of your toddler's personality, both the aspects that thrill you, and those that make relationship hard. Ask him to be the perfect parent to your child through you. Ask God for his love and direction for your child. Ask him to allow you to see this child from his eyes. As you take confidence in believing that God knew what he was doing when he gave you this child, he'll open your heart to a love you may never have expected.

Next, learn everything you need to know in order to parent your child effectively. Remember that virtually everything you're experiencing or will experience someone has already been through. Answers are out there. As soon as you begin to think that your situation is unique and impossible, then you're doomed to failure. Solutions are available. We specialize in solutions at the National Center for Biblical Parenting and we know that every child is unique. Many children don't respond to the typical solutions suggested in parenting books. That doesn't mean that

you can't find help. It's out there and it's your job to find it.

Lastly, besides prayer and study, you'll need to reconstruct your expectations to involve more work. The job of parenting is the toughest job in the world. Your child needs you and with the right plan, you are the best therapist for your child. Plan margin into your life to deal with the unexpected. Look for ways to consolidate your tasks and expand your abilities. Rearranging your priorities and goals is part of what it means to change your expectations. It's not easy but it's part of God's desire for you. Always remember that God is in the business of changing people and he loves to work in the heart. That means your heart as well as your child's.



The Solution to Clutter

“Can you believe it?” Dena asked her friend over coffee. “My grandmother comes to my house for a visit—and not a half hour into the visit ‘suggests’ that I might want to focus on the clutter. I mean I know the floor is covered in toys. And, sure the laundry is a little out of control. But, how dare she! I have a toddler. There’s no way to keep my house clean.”

For parents facing stress and frustration, Grandma may be on to something. Though it’s challenging, controlling clutter may be one of your best strategies for building a calm home.

Clutter has a way of creating its own stress. God designed the brain to crave order. The instinct that drives you to teach your child to classify colors, names of animals, and words for objects, represents this desire for orderliness that God placed in every heart. A sink that’s full of dishes, a floor littered with toys, and a bed covered in laundry all combat the brain’s desire for organization.

This silent assault on the senses creates a background of stress and frustration that subconsciously affects interactions with others, especially in the family. The same

factors influence your spouse and children, even when they're the ones creating the clutter. When your house feels stressed, step one may be checking the clutter level. Simply imposing order, even on just one room, may grant a relief that allows stress levels to drop.

Clutter tends to create conflict. A frantic morning of getting breakfast, dressing self, and dressing your toddler leaves little or no margin to get to your destination on time. Then you hear, "Mom, no find shoe." You gaze at the heaps littering the living room and wonder under which pile the stray shoe might lie. Frustration erupts.

It's hard to remain calm if you can't find what you need when you need it. If the floor is clear, then the stray shoe is easier to find. When objects have a place and are in it, you can scan quickly and get what you need without delay. Order provides a foundation for a calmer home.

Families tolerate varying levels of disorder. For one family, anything less than a House Beautiful cover creates tension. Others tolerate a certain level of jumble with ease. The goal is to create enough order that you can find what you need, sit without moving piles, and view the room without feeling claustrophobic. Know yourself and your family. Which level works for you? You want neither complete chaos nor a home so sterile that it becomes unwelcoming to human habitation. You simply want a home that provides calm to your family.

If you or your spouse are overly sensitive to disorder it might be helpful to reflect on Proverbs 14:4, "Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox." (ESV) The point is that you can have a clean manger if you get rid of the ox but it has some benefits if you're willing to keep it. The same is true for

kids. They provide a lot of benefit to your life both now and in the future, but when you have kids you have to tolerate a bit of mess. The two go together.

Cleaning up a house can appear daunting. If so, break it up into short segments. For example, you might want to employ the ten-minute tidy. Create a routine where at the top of the hour, you spend ten minutes clearing away one mess. Whether you concentrate on breakfast dishes, one load of laundry, or the toys on the floor, focus on clearing one mess, one room, or one area. If you take a few moments several times throughout the day, you'll feel more in control without feeling consumed by cleaning.

One efficiency expert promoted her anti-clutter program by saying, "It only takes 10 minutes to have a clean house." As she continued she revealed the secret that the ten minutes needs to happen several times a day. The point is well taken though. Big jobs are completed in small portions. Start somewhere, keep at it, and over time, you'll see significant results.

Another idea is to use telephone time to complete a task. Mop your floor, clear your kitchen counters, or fold laundry. You can fully converse even as you re-establish order.

Include your toddler. One of the greatest challenges to neatness is a toddler following behind as you clean, pulling everything out again. The disorder seems inevitable, making you wonder why you even bother. Including your toddler keeps the little hands busy and less likely to use those hands to pull out toys behind you. Furthermore, you build relational bonds as you work and you develop the understanding that picking up is part of living in a home. This training pays hugely as your child gets older.

One helpful idea is to take time to clean the kitchen

before you go to bed. This ensures you begin the day ahead of the curve in at least one room. If necessary, use paper plates to avoid a mound of dishes.

Many young parents fail to see the value in neatness in their homes, resulting in significant consequences for family relationships. Work on cleaning up clutter and you'll find an increased sense of peace in yourself and in the relationships in your home.



Keeping Your Marriage Healthy

Ann and Ricardo's first years together were magical. From the moment they met at a friend's cookout, they connected. A short engagement led to three years of married bliss. They camped, worked crossword puzzles, dined at ethnic restaurants, and commiserated over work challenges—all together. Each new endeavor brought deeper conversations, deeper emotional bonds, and deeper intimacy. Then came Tim.

Tim's birth made them a family. Throughout his infancy, Ann and Ricardo marveled that they could love someone so much and reveled in each new development. By toddlerhood, however, life had subtly yet drastically changed. With Ricardo working longer hours to establish his career and Ann balancing a part-time work schedule and the care of Tim, they began to live very separate lives. Juggling jobs, maintaining the house, involvement at church, and keeping up with an active toddler who found his way into everything, left them emotionally and physically exhausted. By the end of the day a yawned “Goodnight” and brush of the lips was all they managed. Through the fog, a growing dissatisfaction permeated the relationship. What happened to the magic?

Parents of toddlers must necessarily focus on a huge range of challenges, figuring out parenthood often without clear or helpful models, establishing a career in a competitive market, and running a household, all while building a healthy marriage that's often fairly new itself and hugely affected by the arrival of a child. Often, the marriage takes a less urgent place in the schedule. Because they love their spouses, believe marriage is important, and have had a child together, couples assume that everything will work out.

This is much like planting a beautiful bed of flowers and then assuming that because you love the flowerbed, believe that the beauty is important, and have gone to the effort to plant flowers, that the garden will remain healthy and vibrant. Without daily watering, diligent weeding, and occasional fertilizing, thorns and thistles will choke to death everything that was once beautiful. Many couples live in marital weed patches where beauty once flourished. Continue to invest in your marriage.

Your boss wants the best from you, your toddler wants the best from you, while your church, friends, and volunteer groups want at least some of the best from you. You know you're pulled in every direction. In the midst of all the pulls, remember to keep your spouse a priority. In a world filled with choices and opportunities it's tempting to give in to the belief that the greatest danger is missing out, so some people can't say no and instead try everything. The real danger lies in sacrificing the best for something less.

Knowing the constant demands placed on you by life in general and individuals in particular, you must intentionally set aside emotional energy and physical time to tend to your marriage, both nurturing the good and weeding out those habits or conflicts that destroy. While books have been writ-

ten on strategies for nurturing marriage, you can begin with a few good habits.

Spend time together daily. Whether you get up early to share a cup of coffee, take time to reconnect as you get home from the day's endeavors, or curl up on the couch after everyone is in bed, find a time every day to fully focus on each other. Occupy children with a video, put toys in a playpen, or meet while they sleep, but find a way to catch up daily on the joys, disappointments, and challenges each of you has faced.

Marriage is the meshing of two into one. It's hard to be one if you don't know what is happening with the other half. As social creatures we are created to share ourselves. In sharing, you build intimacy. The habit of reconnecting each day nourishes the relationship while also giving opportunity to deal with small irritations before they become deep-rooted weeds.

Spend time together weekly. Take time each week to have fun together. Whether you hire a sitter for dinner and a movie or spread a picnic blanket on the living room floor for a candlelight dinner with romantic music, focus on creating moments of fun for the two of you. As you break away from demands and focus on each other, you'll rediscover your delight in sharing interests and exploring the new in each other. This builds deep connections emotionally, intellectually, and physically. When life gets hard, as it does for everyone, couples draw from this storehouse of goodwill and happy memories for motivation to get through. If few deposits have been made, there's not much to draw from.

Spend time together annually. Even if your budget allows only for living room dates, make a priority to get away together once a year. Put work deadlines, leaky plumbing,

and temper tantrums behind for some time to breathe fresh life into your relationship and offer the connection of sharing unusual and special moments together. The weekend at the beach, the night in a nice hotel, and the week at a cabin become treasured moments that knit you together.

Going a step further, many couples take a couple of days each year to talk in-depth about what they want to accomplish as a couple and create a timeline to work toward those goals. Applying the same focus of business planning to marriage makes the statement that this relationship remains top priority and deserves the same consideration and attention as other high priorities.

Song of Solomon immortalizes the great love of marriage, describing the joy the groom and bride find in each other as they compare every part of their lover to the great delights of life. What was their greatest joy? "I am my lover's and my lover is mine." (Song of Solomon 6:3) Couples belong to each other. Intentionally investing time to build connection helps to keep the magic blossoming even during the toddler years.



It's Time for Bed

Two issues challenge parents at bedtime. The first is getting a child to go to sleep at night and the second is middle-of-the-night awakenings. It's helpful to have a plan for both so that you can get a good night's sleep and so that you can provide the training necessary for your child.

Let's start by talking about bedtime. Toddlers usually need 11-13 hours of sleep. Most children ages 12-36 months need a nap during the day and it often lasts for two hours or more. That means that you still have 9-11 hours of sleep to get in for nighttime. You might establish a bedtime at 7:00 pm and see your child awaken at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, sleeping without any problem. Then again, you might adjust that time based on your child's responsiveness to early morning light, a parent's work schedule, or a child's particular needs.

A bedtime is helpful not only because it establishes a routine and creates expectations and structure. It also helps develop self-discipline. Even adults generally set a bedtime and try to adhere to it even if they aren't tired. It's a part of being healthy.

Once you establish the bedtime, it's best if you're not

rushed to accomplish the before-bed to do list. Although some evenings your child might be so tired that you just put a diaper on and head to the bedroom, often you'll want to enter into a ritual of things such as getting pajamas on, reading a book, brushing teeth, getting a small drink, tucking in, praying, singing a song, hugging and kissing, and saying good night. Your child will look forward to these activities, and the routine often contributes to a good night's sleep.

Then it's time to leave the room. Here's where the challenge often happens. When parents leave the room we have a host of possible activities a child can engage in. Sometimes kids get up and go find Mom or Dad. Other times they call out, cry, ask questions, or otherwise express a desire for more parent time. Some have even been known to get out of their crib or bed and turn on the light and start playing with toys.

Going to bed and getting to sleep require some skills, and you're the one who can teach them. After you say good night you may need to sit in the doorway or nearby to make sure that your child doesn't get up. Be careful not to engage in dialogue but simply say, "It's time to sleep now." Your gentle but firm approach helps your toddler to see that there are no other options and sleep will soon follow. It usually takes some diligent work on your part for some time but that hard work pays off.

The next nighttime challenge comes when your toddler wakes up in the middle of the night. Some kids just come and crawl in bed with their parents. Others come and stand by your bed or fall asleep on your floor. Some children call out from the other room for you to come join them in their waking moments in the night. All of these are typical signs of internal desire for relationship. Your

toddler wants to be with you, and closeness provides the comfort to go back to sleep. There's nothing necessarily wrong with having your child join you in your room or for you to get up and comfort your child. After all, kids eventually grow out of their need for parental help in the middle of the night. Your teenagers won't want to crawl in bed with you. They grow up.

You may not want to wait until adolescence to get a good night's sleep, however, so you can teach younger children to stay in bed. You'll use nighttimes to develop independence and some important self-comforting skills. Start by having a talk with your toddler and explain it something like this. "You're two years old now so you can take care of yourself at night. Everyone wakes up in the middle of the night, even if they are adults. We all need to put ourselves back to sleep."

Some parents will then use a cold-turkey method and refuse to respond to a child's call. Although this will likely work, it might be better to use a little more gentle approach by weaning your child from your comfort activities to self-comfort. You might take a child back to bed or respond to a call and coach your child through the process of going back to sleep. Persistent work over time produces the desired results. This may be one of those times when an external reward might be helpful to get over the hump or start a new routine.

Bedtimes and sleep are an important part of a child's life and always will be. Proverbs 3:24 speaks of the value of living according to God's ways. One of the benefits is that "when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet." Children can practice that benefit now and enjoy sweet sleep. Keep in mind that

kids often want to talk just before bed. That may be a time when you want to listen to what they have to say. Some of the most important conversations you have with your child over the years may take place at bedtime. So, don't let your structure get in the way of your relationship. Furthermore, if you find that your child wants to talk a lot at bedtime you might want to allow a little more margin in your schedule to make the most of it. Talking about the day and praying together before bed can be one of the best sleep aids both now and for years to come.



Armed and Ready

The Boy Scout motto “Be Ready” is a good plan for any parent of a toddler. Here are some general pieces of advice to get you through much of life.

Let your toddler help you do the tasks of life. Yes, you can do them faster alone, but teaching takes place in the common things of life.

Use mugs instead of bowls for things like cereal, apple-sauce, and yogurt. The high sides enable toddlers to use a spoon more easily than bowls.

Keep plenty of stain removers, paper towels, and a cleaning manual on hand. Life with toddlers is messy. If you're prepared, you can take it in stride.

Keep Band-Aids, antibiotic ointment, burn cream, fever reducer, and ice packs in your house, car, and purse. Life with toddlers is exciting. If you're prepared, you'll panic less.

Make the hardest jobs easier so you can concentrate on your children. If you hate doing dishes, buy paper plates. Take the shortcuts on chores, not people.

Take cranky children for a drive or walk. The change of scenery can do wonders.

Put a cranky toddler in the bath with funnels and plastic cups. Playing in the water can bring smiles from the grumpiest child.

Put on music and dance with your toddler. Young kids love the movement and you'll bond in new ways.

Keep snacks handy, a surefire distracter for long waits. Also, keep a few toys that only make their appearance in restaurants or waiting rooms.

For long vacations, go to a dollar store and buy several picture books, animals, or toys, then wrap in colorful paper (can be Sunday comics). As children become tired of sitting, hand a surprise for them to open.

But also be ready for the relational challenges so that you're not surprised by your child's antics. Know in advance how you're going to handle defiance, temper tantrums, and the word "no" from your toddler.

Practice your correction routine and your instruction routine over and over at home so that when you get into public it works.

It's not usually the problems you'll face with your toddler that get you upset. It's the surprise that catches you off guard. Always be ready for surprises. When Peter wrote his book to the New Testament believers, he warned them about the persecution they would suffer. He gave them good advice to remind them to be ready for whatever might come their way. In 1 Peter 4:12 he said, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." Peter knew that if the believers were ready they'd be able to face the problems they would encounter.

Although we wouldn't consider life with a toddler persecution, the advice is still good. Be ready, think ahead,

practice in private, and when you do, good things will happen.

Toddler life will soon be past. It's a special time of growth and experiential learning for your child. Enjoy it while you can. Pray for your child every day. Trust God for the strength you need to do the difficult job of parenting. It isn't easy. In fact, it's the toughest job in the world. Ask God for his strength and grace to meet the challenges you'll face every day. And thank him for the blessings.

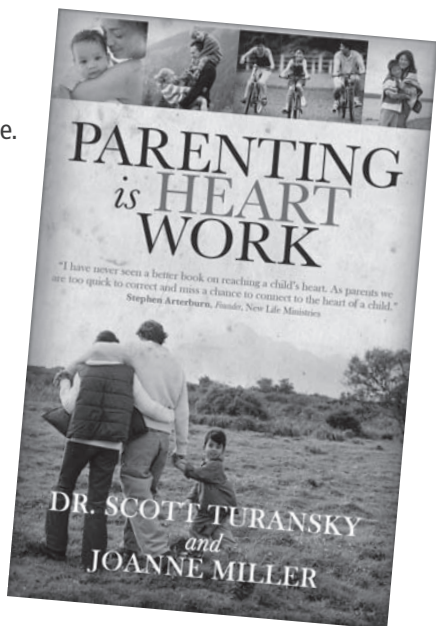
When you get that special smile, that surprise hug, or that indicator that your child is growing up, it makes it all worthwhile. Progress will happen and by God's grace you too will grow through the process. Always remember that God loves you and offers hope. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Be encouraged and hopeful as you do the hard work of raising your child.

Parenting is Heart Work

Learn what it means to touch a child's heart. This practical, biblical resource will change the way parents view their role. You'll learn how to help children make long-term changes. Many times parents have to change the way they parent in order for children to change the way they live.

Offering a new way to look at parenting,

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN share the results of their study of over 750 times the word "heart" is used in the Bible. Giving practical application, relevant illustrations, and many helpful suggestions, **Parenting is Heart Work** will help you understand what the heart is and how you can mold and direct the heart of your child. Over 50 ministry leaders, Christian psychologists, and pastors endorsed this book before it was even released. AWANA purchased 5000 copies for their parent-training programs. Learn how you can help your kids make lasting changes. It's all about the heart.



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