

# Embracing Toddlerhood

What to Expect & How to Support Your  
Child's Development Along the Way



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# Domains of Development



## Transitions & Boundaries

- The importance of consistency, expectations, and limitations.



## Challenging Behaviors

- What triggers tantrums and meltdowns and how to navigate through them.



## Toileting & "Potty Training"

- Understanding and respecting the true signs of readiness



# Transitions & Boundaries

## Transitions are EVERYWHERE!

- Transitions are when we switch from one event/place to another, e.g.:
  - These can be "small," everyday experiences or "big" life events:
    - Leaving the house to go to school, going down for nap after lunch, potty training, moving across the world, etc.
- **The more routine & predictable (typically) results in smoother and more confident transitions.**
- **Why children may struggle with transitions:**
  - Inconsistency and unpredictable routines and expectations
  - Power struggles
  - Fearful of the next event/person (e.g. going to the doctor)
  - Hungry or Triple "O" (overwhelmed, overtired, overstimulated)
  - Lack of or boundaries

## Establishing & Maintaining Reliable Boundaries

- **Boundaries are the necessary limitations that every single person needs in order to feel psychologically and physically safe.**
- If children are not provided with reliable boundaries, they will subconsciously seek them out, pushing or "testing" until they achieve them.



# Tips to Support Transitions & Boundaries

- **Give your child notice prior to the transition (Ideally 5 minutes, then 1 minute)**
  - Let them know the amount of time left **AND** what's happening next.
  - If transitions are hard for your child, you may **consider a visual reminder** such as a timer, hour glass, or a visual daily schedule.
- **For new experiences, describe to your child what they can expect:**
  - Who they will see, what they will do, etc. a week prior to the new event. You can also role play, provide pictures and/or relative books.
- **Mean what you say and say what you mean**
  - **Always follow through with the plan** – validity, reliability, sense of security, & trust.
  - **Do NOT "threat"** with something you're not prepared to follow through with.
  - **DO** inform children of when they **CAN engage with the desired behavior.**
  - **DO** provide developmentally appropriate **choices & "jobs" when applicable:**
    - "It's time for bed! Do you want to wear your dinosaur pajamas or your rainbow pajamas?"





# Challenging Behaviors

## Tantrums & Meltdowns

- While challenging to navigate through, **tantrums and meltdowns are healthy, developmental, biological states of dysregulation.**
  - **The ability to self-regulate is a developmental skill that takes time.**
  - Tantrums do not mean your child is "bad" or manipulating you, nor does it mean you are a parent that doesn't know what they're doing.
- Tantrums may result from many things, including hunger and the "triple O":
  - **O**verwhelmed, **O**vertired, **O**verstimulated

## Physical Engagement as a Way to Communicate

- Toddlers have significantly greater receptive language skills, meaning **they understand far more than they can say.**
  - This leads to toddlers favoring **nonverbal communication** (reaching, waving, pointing, signing, hitting, etc.) as it is easier and time efficient.
  - The lack of more robust and intelligible, expressive language, paired with impulsivity and underdeveloped decision-making skills often **results in toddlers biting, hitting, grabbing from, & pushing others.**



# Tips to Support Challenging Behaviors

- **Be cognizant of possible triggers (behaviors happening at a particular time of the day?)**
- **Tantrums are not a time for rationalizing, directing, shaming, or reasoning.**
  - Instead, **validate their feelings and reassure them you are not going anywhere.** "You're feeling upset about \_\_\_\_\_ " or "you're disappointed that \_\_\_\_." "I love you, I am here for you, and I will help keep you safe." **After a tantrum** is the time to provide some tools:
    - **Alternative:** "I know you were feeling upset before." I feel upset when \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes when I feel this way I take big, deep breaths like this... Want to try it with me?"
- **Support expressive language development:**
  - Read books, sing songs, and describe daily observations
  - Avoid the phrase "use your words!" or prompting with "say \_\_\_\_\_ ("please," "sorry," etc.)! instead, give children the language they need by **broadcasting your observations and model language in your "day-to-day.**
- **Reframe from your child attention-seeking to connection-seeking!**





# Toileting & "Training"

## An Introduction to Toilet Learning

- **Many children will begin to show signs around 2-3 years old**, however, there is a greater range. Some children may be 18 months while others may be closer to turning 4 years old before they're ready. There is a broad range because there are many developmental factors.
- **Signs of Readiness:**
  - Hold-in urine for 2+ hours
  - Follow 2-step directions
  - Communicate (language or sign) about toileting events, e.g. they have to go or have already soiled themselves
  - Your child is emotionally available & open to trying

## Respecting their Process

- There can be many **physical** (not able to hold in their urine), **emotional** (fear of the potty, big life event, pressure to go), and **medical reasons** why a child may not be using the potty.
- Forcing this prematurely may diminish confidence and self-esteem, drive a wedge in your relationship, and can even lead to your child getting UTI's, constipation, and bedwetting (withholding from stress).



# Tips to Support Toilet Learning

- **Prep your child for this new transition (when they're truly ready!):**
  - Begin having conversations before they begin using the potty
  - Welcome them into the bathroom with you so they can observe steps
  - Buy relative and appropriate items: potty/seat, underwear, potty related books.
- **Don't force the process:**
  - Forced "potty training" before physically and/or emotionally ready can **result in physical and/or emotional repercussions.**
    - If you have to place your child on the potty every 15 minutes and feel the need to keep them on the potty for several minutes, **they're not ready – and that's okay!**
    - **Avoid giving them toys and reading them books ON the potty,** as it will distract them from recognizing internal cues happening within their body.
- **Avoid rewards systems such as stickers, snacks, and toys:**
  - Promotes extrinsic motivation over intrinsic motivation.

