

Well Child Care

TIP SHEET FOR PROVIDERS

Key Themes

- Introduce the idea of the developmental mismatch between blossoming cognitive development and lagging ability to regulate emotions.
- Reassure that the **emergence of temper tantrums and behaviors such as hitting and biting occur in most typically developing toddlers**. It isn't spoiling to help the child with their BIG emotions.
- Review the growth plateau and expected decrease in appetite between 12–24 months.
- Emphasize the **importance of repair within the relationship**. The toddler years have many moments of frustration. Re-connecting after difficult moments strengthens the relationship and builds the child's capacity for emotion regulation.

Development

Between 12 months and 24 months, toddler's have a **"language explosion"** in both their receptive and expressive language. At 12 months, most babies understand about 20–100 words and say one or two words. By age 2, they will understand about 150–300 words and say 50–100 words.

It is helpful to think of the 2 year old's development with "The Rule of 2's": By **two** years of age, most toddlers can:

- say 50 words or more
- combine **2** words (ideas) together, i.e. "mommy, go" or "daddy, up"
- Follow **2** step directions
- Problem solve with **2** steps (i.e. get a stool to reach something or bring their shoes to their parent if they want to go somewhere).

Joint attention continues to become more complex. Proto-imperative pointing, i.e. pointing to obtain a desired object is typically seen between 12–14 months. Proto-declarative pointing i.e. pointing to share interest develops next around 14 months. Pretend play is also starting to emerge.

At the same time, toddlers are become more coordinated and motorically busy.

There will be **much bigger expressions of frustration, protesting and tantrums** given the developmental

mismatch between the toddler's BIGGER ideas and even BIGGER emotions.

The need for co-regulation will continue to increase as the "developmental mismatch" between their baby's cognitive development and emotion regulation becomes larger. The **"Terrible Twos"** often start right at the first birthday.

Toddler's are just starting to develop inhibitory capacity but overall lack impulse control. They often will continue to do something after parent's say no. Parents can mistake this persistence/non-compliance as willful disobedience and feel triggered by their toddler's misbehavior. This persistence is a lack of inhibitory control and a sign that the toddler needs support from the parents to change direction.

Flexible limit-setting starts to be more important so that toddlers can learn as they start more mobile exploration of their world. Limits applied flexibly and gently contribute to the toddler's world feeling predictable and safe which helps with their ability to manage their emotions.

Babies love stories and nursery rhymes at this age. We all understand and learn language better when it is directed contingently at what we are doing.

Providers—During the visit, point out examples of two step problem-solving to help the parents see this important gain in development and their role in teaching their child. Reassure parents that **providing co-regulation of their toddler's big emotions** helps their baby gain future emotion regulation skills. Encourage parents to narrate what their baby is doing and what is happening during the day.

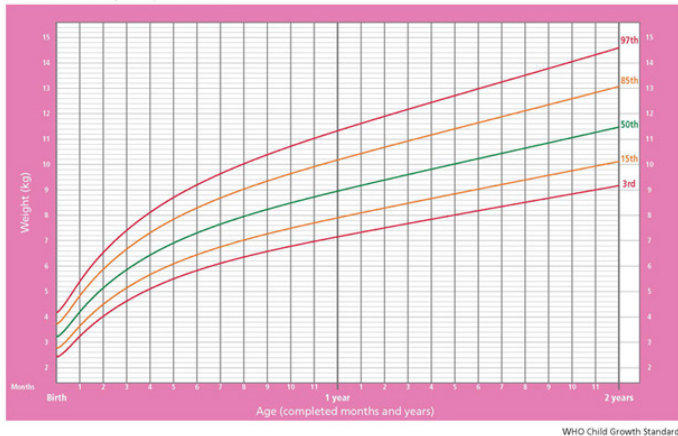
Feeding

Toddlers are **picky eaters**. Their BMI between continues to decrease until it reaches its nadir at about age 6. Parents worry about the change from their round appearing baby to their thin appearing toddler (from the decreasing BMI at this age) who hardly eats.

Providers—**Reassure parents that being picky and often eating very little at mealtimes is normal at this age**. Review the growth chart and the plateau in weight gain that starts around 12 months. Empathize with parents that it can be

Weight-for-age GIRLS

Birth to 2 years (percentiles)



Normal plateau in weight gain starting around 12 months, coinciding with decreasing BMI in older infants.

really stressful to watch a 1–2 year old eat very little every day but that the baby’s appetite and intake is supposed to drop off at this age. By offering 3 meals a day and a morning and afternoon snack, their baby will have plenty of opportunity to take in calories if they are hungry.

From an evolutionary standpoint, **parents are hard-wired to feel worried about infant feeding.** Parents need the provider’s reassurance even more to stay the course of enjoying family meals together, while continuing not to override cues and force babies to eat. Additionally, **some families feel pressured to cook extra meals** to encourage the baby to eat. This is exhausting and frustrating and can trigger obesity and feeding battles.

Emphasize that the **feeding relationship and family mealtimes are a key time to be responsive to cues** and to share language and moments of delight. Discuss the **“division of responsibility at mealtimes”**, i.e. the parent’s job “stops at the plate” and then it is up to the toddler to eat if they feel hungry. **Parents do not need to coax them to eat more.**

SUMMARY

- Notice and share observations in real-time during the visit about the toddlers new developmental gains if they are demonstrated, ie the language explosion, more sophisticated joint (shared) attention, pretend play, two step problem solving and increased certainty about their wants and needs .
- Frame the increasing temper tantrums and protesting as a mismatch between this blossoming cognitive ability and the lag in emotion regulation and inhibitory capacity.
- Reassure that it is still NOT spoiling to respond to their child’s distress and to help calm these big emotions.
- Predictable routines and flexible limit setting help the toddler learn what’s next and help with emotion regulation.
- Reassure about the plateau in weight gain and provide containment of parents concerns about feeding to help keep the feeding relationship positive and as source of shared delight in the relationship.

Toddlers do not need calories during the night and if they are still feeding during the night, these feedings can be tapered off.

Sleep

Sleep is becoming more organized. Toddlers grow out of their morning nap between 12 and 18 months. They then settle into a longer afternoon nap and better, longer night sleep. They often grow out of the afternoon nap around age 3.

They are often more ready to wean off their nighttime feedings if they are still waking to feed since they are starting to naturally consolidate their night sleep

More information available at pcrprograms.org

Referenced sources include: Promoting First Relationships in Pediatric Primary Care, Keys to Infant Caregiving, Parent-Child Interaction (PCI) Feeding & Teaching Scales, Sleep/Activity Program and BabyCues[®]