

Parent Connections

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Little Kids, Big Questions

This series of 12 podcasts translates the research of early childhood development into parenting practices that mothers, fathers and other caregivers can adapt to the needs of their own child and family.

To listen to or to download the podcasts, visit the Zero to Three Website:

<http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/parenting-resources/podcast/>

This series of podcasts has been generously funded by MetLife Foundation and covers topics like developing healthy eating habits, bedtime routines, comforting a crying baby, nurturing early brain development, and the role of grandparents in children’s early learning.

How Do I Stop the Whining?

There are few behaviors that are more frustrating to parents than *whining*. For children, whining can be a quick and easy way to get a parent’s full attention. Children whine when they feel overwhelmed by an emotion or desire and do not have the vocabulary to express their feelings or when they do not have the skills to complete a task or because they feel tired, hungry, powerless, or lonely. Simply put, children whine to ask for help, and the bottom line is that *a child will continue to whine until caregivers teach him a new skill*.

When parents “give in” to a whine for candy at the check-out counter, they’re teaching that whining behavior WORKS, and, if a behavior works, he will definitely use it again. Instead, parents can teach their children to use their words to tell about their feelings and, together, they can come up with a way to solve the problem.

Things to try at home:

- ✓ If your child often whines when she is tired, consider running errands before or after her nap time, when she is rested.
- ✓ If your child often whines when she is hungry or bored, always carry a small snack and a small toy or favorite item/activity that is only for this type of occasion. For example, you could have a bucket of puzzles, books, or toys that you only take out when you are on the phone.
- ✓ Teach your child that his needs get met when he uses his words. If he is whining for milk, tell him, “You can say, daddy, milk please.” When he uses those words (or anything like it), follow up by saying, “Of course I will get your milk! Thank you for using your words!”
- ✓ At a calm, happy time, play the whining game. Make a stop light sign with “red, stop” on one side and “green, go” on the other. Switch roles so the child is the parent while you pretend to be the child. Ask your child for a toy using a variety of voices—whining, yelling, talking and whispering. After each request ask him, “Stop or go?” and let him show you with the sign. Take turns practicing and taking turns together.

For more tips, visit:

http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/bkpk_whining.pdf

Social-Emotional Milestones

Social-emotional milestones are often harder to spot than signs of physical development like sitting up, holding a toy, crawling, and walking. The area of social emotional development emphasizes skills that increase self-awareness and self-regulation and include things like the ability to pay attention, make transitions from one activity to another, and cooperate with others. Research shows that social skills and emotional development are an important part of children's early development (birth to five) and necessary for kindergarten readiness.

The First Year:

From the start, babies explore their world - themselves and other people.

0-3 months	<p>Babies spend a lot of time getting to know their own bodies. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Suck their own fingers</i> • <i>Observe their own hands</i> • <i>Look at the place on the body that is being touched</i> • <i>Begin to realize she is a separate person</i> • <i>Learn how body parts, like arms and legs, are attached</i> <p>Infants are interested in other people and learn to recognize primary caregivers and begin:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To be comforted by familiar adult</i> • <i>To respond positively to touch</i> • <i>To interact best when in an alert state or in an inactive but attentive state</i> • <i>To enjoy short, frequent interactions more than long, infrequent ones</i> • <i>To smile and show pleasure in response to social stimulation</i>
3-6 months	<p>Babies this age may initiate social interaction. They begin to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Play peek-a-boo</i> • <i>Pay attention to own name</i> • <i>Smile spontaneously</i> • <i>Laugh aloud</i>
6-9 months	<p>Babies this age show a wider emotional range and stronger preferences for familiar people, they begin to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Clearly express several different emotions</i> • <i>Distinguish friends from strangers</i> • <i>Respond actively to language and gestures</i> • <i>Show displeasure at loss of a toy</i>
9-12 months	<p>As babies near the 1st birthday, imitation and self-regulation gain importance and begin to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Feed themselves finger foods</i> • <i>Hold a cup with two hands and drink with assistance</i> • <i>Hold out arms and legs while being dressed</i> • <i>Mimic simple actions</i> • <i>Show anxiety when separated from primary caregiver</i>

From One to Two:

Babies this age become more aware of themselves and their ability to make things happen. They express a wider range of emotions and are more likely to initiate interaction with other people. They begin to:

- *Recognize themselves in pictures or the mirror and smile or make faces at themselves*
- *Show intense feelings for parents and show affection for other familiar people*
- *Play by themselves and initiate their own play*
- *Express negative feelings*
- *Show pride and pleasure at new accomplishments*
- *Imitate adult behaviors in play*
- *Show a strong sense of self through assertiveness, directing others*
- *Begin to be helpful, such as by helping to put things away*

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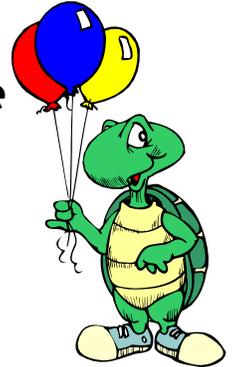


From Two to Three:

Toddlers begin to experience themselves as more powerful, creative "doers." They explore everything and expand their range of self-help skills. Self-regulation is a big challenge and two-year-olds are likely to:

- Be assertive about their preferences and say "no" to adult requests
- Experience rapid mood shifts and show increased fearfulness (for example, fear of the dark, or certain objects)
- Display aggressive feelings and behaviors
- "Parallel play" (solitary activities near other children)
- Defend their possessions (ie: not want to share)
- Watch other children at play and briefly join in
- Participate in simple group activities like singing, clapping, dancing
- Show awareness of gender identity
- Help to dress and undress themselves
- Use objects symbolically in play and/or "play house"
- Begin self-evaluation and develop notions of themselves as good, bad, attractive, etc.
- Show awareness of their own feelings and those of others, and talk about feelings
- Indicate toileting needs

The "Tucker Turtle" Technique



Helping Young Children Control Anger and Handle Disappointment

While it may be true that children often hear adults telling them to "calm down," it is very unlikely that this simple direction will result in any changes in children's affect or behavior. In some instances this kind of command may even escalate a child's angry response. Cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI) strategies can provide children with the requisite skills to control anger and handle disappointment. CBIs offer strategies for teaching appropriate replacement skills to angry outbursts and aggression by teaching strategies that guide performance and reduce inappropriate behaviors. The technique teaches young children how to regulate themselves.

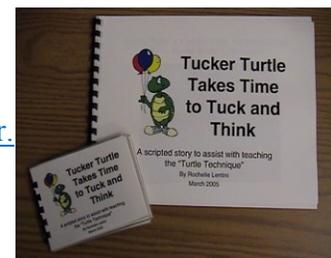
The "turtle technique" is a CBI strategy that has been used successfully with preschool and kindergarten age children.

The basic steps of the turtle technique are:

- ✓ Recognizing that you feel angry
- ✓ Thinking "stop"
- ✓ Going into your "shell" and taking three deep breaths and thinking calming, coping thoughts, "It was an accident. I can calm down and think of good solutions. I am a good problem solver."
- ✓ Coming out of your "shell" when calm and think of some solutions to the problem.

Teaching the turtle technique to young children can be done at home and/or in preschool or daycare settings. Materials to support teaching the technique include a story activity and directions for parents or teachers, linked on the TACSEI Web site. The strategy suggests using a stuffed or toy turtle or even a turtle puppet to keep young children's attention and to serve as a visual reminder of the strategy.

To print off the Tucker Turtle story / activity and directions/information at no cost, visit: http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/teaching_tools/ttyc_toc.htm#turtle



Parent Question of the Quarter:

Q: I took my 14-month-old to a new playgroup last week. All the other children were running around and exploring happily. My son clung to me for dear life. I'd like to keep attending. What do I do?



A: Children approach, take in, and react to the world around them in different ways. We call this their “temperament.” For example, there are the very flexible children, the “roll with it” types, who eagerly approach new situations as if to say, *I’m here. Bring it on!* On the other end of the spectrum are children who are cautious and fearful of new situations and need time and support to adjust. These children also tend to get overwhelmed when faced with lots of noise and activity, and often prefer quiet play with just one or two familiar people, and many children fall somewhere in between these two. *One temperament is not better than another—just different.* The job for parents is to take the time to understand who their unique child is, and to encourage his strengths while supporting him in areas where he needs help.

It is hard to see our children struggle or feel anxious, and one temptation would be to quit the playgroup, but this may not be the most useful choice for either you or your child. As your child grows, he’ll face many situations that require interacting and getting along with others. A playgroup provides a great opportunity to help your child learn to adapt to and find pleasure in new relationships and experiences. **So, what to do?** Try to look for ways to make playgroup more familiar and less scary for your child. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- Arrive at the playgroup early to give your child a chance to explore without a lot of other children around. Sit down and play a little, just you and him.
- Once playgroup gets going, follow your child’s lead and read his signals. If he clings to you, comfort and reassure him. Pick him up and walk around the room. Rather than thrusting him into situations, take things at his speed.
- Shorten the time you spend at playgroup for a few weeks. Gradually lengthen your stay as he becomes more comfortable.
- When your child is getting overwhelmed or distressed, take a walk or go to a quiet room.
- Set up your toys next to another child, encouraging the “side by side” play that is so common for toddlers.
- When your child is happily playing alongside or with another youngster, slowly step away.

Through small steps like these over several weeks, your child will eventually feel comfortable and secure.