

WORK & FAMILY LIFE

BALANCING JOB AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

SEPTEMBER 2010
VOL. 24, NO. 9

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for family, workplace
and health issues*

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Building with blocks is fun—especially with an encouraging Dad looking on.

The lowdown on bringing up a toddler

By Harvey Karp, M.D.

Where did your baby go? One day you're cradling a tiny newborn in your arms and then, before you know it, you're living with an all-new creature: cuter than ever, but suddenly opinionated, stubborn and lightning fast. There's nothing like a one, two or three year old to help you see the world in wonderful new ways—the bugs in the grass, the shapes in the clouds.

Toddlers brim with curiosity, excitement and irresistible charm. But, as every parent knows, it's not all fun. Around the first birthday, many parents experience a mini “clash of civilizations,” as toddlers' actions and opinions put them on a collision course with the family's rules and expectations.

One reason they act the way they do is because, during their early years, toddlers experience a rush of brain development that frequently knocks them off balance. Compared to older kids, toddlers have immature brains, and when they get upset, the brain center that controls language, logic and patience literally shuts down.

Anyone living with a toddler knows how quickly the emotional climate can shift. One minute, all is bliss. Then *bam*, he or she may cry, scream and erupt into a tantrum. And despite your best intentions, the only words that come to you are “No!” “Stop!” and “Don't touch!”

The dilemma for parents

Parents of toddlers want to know how to get their children to behave, to be kind and cooperative, and to grow up emotionally happy and healthy. But they're bombarded with contradictory advice: *Be giving! Be strict! Be a friend! Be the boss!*

Trying to be a buddy and repeatedly giving in to kids' demands may end up teaching them that whining works and can turn them into spoiled brats. On the other hand, trying to be “the boss” relies too much on threats and often ends up inflaming rather than reducing confrontations.

To build good relationships with young children, parents need some key skills, among which is the ability to communicate with respect—and to speak the language a

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Lowdown on toddlers...

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toddler's brain can understand.

Communicating with respect

This simple rule works with toddlers (and everyone else). Whenever you talk to someone who is upset, repeat the person's feelings first—before offering your own comments or advice: *"I know you wanted ice cream..."*

When we're upset, we want our friends to *hear us* lovingly and attentively. The feeling of being heard, respected and understood makes us more open to offers of advice, reassurance or distraction.

The same goes for toddlers. When they get upset, acknowledge their dismay. Then, once your child calms down a bit, you can try to distract her, reassure him, or solve the problem. Here are some other things you might do and say.

BE PHYSICAL. Offer a hug, touse his hair, put a hand on her shoulder or just sit quietly together.

WHISPER. It's a fun way to change the subject and reconnect.

GIVE OPTIONS. "We can't have soda. How about some juice?"

BRIEFLY EXPLAIN YOUR POINT OF VIEW. Save important lessons for a calmer time, later on, when your child can pay better attention.

GRANT A WISH IN FANTASY. "I wish I could vroom up all the rain and we could go outside and play now."

GIVE "YOU-I" MESSAGES. Share your feelings in a brief "you-I" sentence to help a toddler understand how others feel: "When you kick me, I feel angry" or "When you call me stupid, I feel sad."

HELP A TODDLER EXPRESS FEELINGS. "Show me your happy face...sad face...mad face." While you're reading, ask: "Look at that sad baby. How do you look when you feel sad? How do you think that boy feels?"

Some things to avoid

I'm always amazed to hear parents call their children names like "idiot" or "whiner"—words they



"Thanks for sprinkling the baking powder. You helped me a lot!"

would never allow a stranger to say to their child.

Angry words can slip out of all of us. Just keep in mind that name calling is particularly hurtful to kids around two—because they're very focused on words and they also care a lot what others think.

Sweeping statements like "You're the worst..." or "You never try" or "You always whine" are exaggerations and, as such, they are usually unfair and always untrue. I recommend tossing the words "always," "never," "best" and "worst" out of your vocabulary.

At the same time, replace those mean labels that can tear toddlers down with descriptions that will build them up. For example, instead of bossy, hyper and nosy, use "a leader," "energetic, spirited" and "curious."

When things start to change

At around 15 months, your toddler will develop some new traits that will make life easier.

BETWEEN 18 AND 36 MONTHS, a child's reasonable, sentence-speaking, impulse-controlling left brain kicks into gear. He or she will want to watch and imitate everything you do, from sweeping the floor to showing kindness—and, yes, even swearing.

At this time, kids start to enjoy putting all the cars in one pile and the horses in another. This love

of order can become quite rigid. Toddlers may get upset if you change a routine or give them a cracker with a broken corner.

How you give praise matters

"TIME-INS" WORK BETTER than a steady stream of time-outs in raising a happy, cooperative child. A wink, a smile and a high five are the simplest form of time-ins.

Praise is the time-in that's most used by parents. But be careful: it can backfire. Here's how to make your praise really count.

GIVE KIDS A "BALANCED DIET" OF PRAISE. Parents who always hype their comments ("You're the best...in the world") may end up with a toddler who either mistrusts praise or needs constant applause to feel a sense of self-worth.

PRAISE THE ACTION YOU WANT TO ENCOURAGE. When your child helps you set the table, instead of saying, "You're my best helper ever," say "Thanks for setting the table. That was really helpful."

PRAISE GOOD TRIES. Cheer toddlers on when they try, even if they don't succeed. "Good try pouring the milk." You'll see steady progress, and your child will feel like a success every step of the way.

DON'T GIVE PRAISE, THEN YANK IT BACK. "Good, you picked up your toys. Why do I always have to nag you to do it?" It's like getting a gift

and having it taken back. It teaches kids to not trust a compliment.

LET YOUR PRAISE STYLE CHANGE AS YOUR CHILD GROWS.

For early toddlers (12-18 months), be generous. Give lots of smiles, a little applause and a few happy words. For middle toddlers (18-36 months), scale back your over-the-top praise. Give occasional applause, lots of smiles and comment on specifics: "Wow, you built a really tall tower." Older kids (36-48 months) love being compared to something smart or powerful. "Thanks for getting the keys. You did it fast as a tiger!"

The special role of patience

TEACHING PATIENCE will help your child become more reasonable, less impulsive and less whiny. Later it helps both in and out of school.

WHAT I CALL "patience stretching" helps kids learn to be patient by expecting them to wait a tiny bit, then a bit more, then even more.

A COMMON APPROACH to teaching patience is for a parent to tell a two year old who's tugging on your jacket, "Just a second, sweetheart." But that doesn't do the trick.

WHAT WORKS BETTER is to have something your toddler wants, such as food or a toy. First, you almost give your child the juice he or she asked for, but then you say, "Wait, just one second," as if you remembered something and turn away for a few seconds. Turn back, give your toddler the juice and say, "Good waiting." An added plus: your child will also see that you keep your word.

TIMERS CAN HELP older toddlers practice patience. Initially set the timer for 20 seconds and then gradually increase the waiting period to a minute or two.

LEARNING HOW TO BREATHE deeply helps develop patience and is also a self-soothing skill kids can use anytime when they're frustrated, scared, hurt or angry. ♦

—Adapted from the author's book *"The Happiest Toddler on the Block"* (Bantam Books). See *We Recommend* on page 8. Visit www.happiestbaby.com.

Meet the happiest toddler on the block

Why do toddlers behave the way they do? What is it about their normal development that often puts them on a collision course with their parents? And why is it important to identify your child's temperament?

California pediatrician Harvey Karp answers those questions and offers helpful strategies for parents in *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*, a wonderful

sequel to his bestseller *The Happiest Baby on the Block*.

Parents also have the option of watching Dr. Karp as he teaches his innovative approach on a DVD based on the *Toddler* book.

As he explains in the book and on the DVD, respect is essential to a good relationship with young kids—but it doesn't mean letting a toddler run wild. When you are firm and respectful with your child, he says, you're modeling the behavior you want to nurture.

Dr. Karp shows parents *how* to give “you-I” messages—and *why*. He offers key insights, for example: It's natural to want to comfort an upset child, but saying

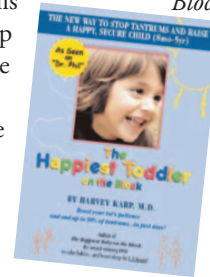
over and over again, “It's okay, it's okay” may give kids the message that you want them to stuff their feelings deep down inside and act happy even if they aren't. And that's *not* okay!

Dr. Karp's tips for boosting a toddler's good actions and manners are very specific. He shows that “time-ins” work better than “time-outs” and tells parents how to stop most tantrums before they start.

He tackles all the tough issues such as how to set limits, curb annoying behaviors and put

the breaks on dangerous or disrespectful behavior. He explains why mushy limits often backfire and make kids defy us even more. Dr. Karp's approach to raising toddlers is, in the words of the eminent Dr. Kyle Pruett, “one of the smartest parenting ideas of the past decade.”

The Happiest Toddler on the Block: How to Eliminate Tantrums and Raise a Patient, Respectful, and Cooperative One- to Four-Year-Old is available in bookstores and online (www.happiestbaby.com, Bantam paperback \$15 and DVD \$26.95). ♦



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