

The Independence of Toddlers Young and Old

The Infamous Word...

“ N O ! ”

This is nearly the first clear word out of any child's mouth. And though we may cringe at the first sound of it, a child's confidence to speak it should be relished.

How on earth can parents and teachers alike relish in hearing a child tell them, “No!” when asked to get their coat on, or asked to sit down, or asked to stop running, yelling, jumping on the bed....? It is a constant struggle to remain calm, cool and collected. This can be done...at least some of the time.

The meaning of toddler hood is independence. The child is learning so many new things. Their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development is starting to allow them to accomplish tasks they never before could accomplish. This is exciting! And this is why when a toddler learns how to undress for the first time they seem to constantly be taking off their pants, shoes, socks, shirt... regardless of time or place! As toddlers become aware of their abilities, we must find appropriate outlets for them. Here are some ideas:

- If your toddler learns how to undress, then provide a doll or stuffed animal with removable clothes.
- If your toddler learns to open doors, provide handles and doorknobs on their playhouse or other area that is appropriate. Make sure that your toddler is able to produce a response when turning the door knob (the door/object opens, something appears, etc.)
- If your toddler learns to turn on the faucet, allow them to help you with dishes, independently wash their hands, or give them the job of turning on the water when it is time to brush teeth.

- If your toddler learns to climb on anything imaginable, give them ample time every day to climb on appropriate objects (jungle gym, tumbling mats, playground equipment, etc.)
- If your toddler learns to run, give them the space and time to run every day.

These ideas will hopefully be helpful to you with your toddler. Remember, they are not out to make our lives more adventurous (miserable?!?!?) but are only discovering what their abilities are and what their limits are. Encourage them in their endeavors and you may find the need for discipline lessens.

Second to that little two-letter word is the importance of...

C H O I C E

After your toddler learns that their body can accomplish new and exciting things, they soon realize what they do and don't want to do. Believe it or not, they are exercising their right for free speech!!

Well, there is no way around this one. You need to give in to your toddler and their desire to do what they want... no, no, no, not exactly. What we need to do is always give them a choice. And the number one rule to giving your toddler a choice is...

1. To be sure that whichever option they choose **it will be acceptable to you!** For example:

Toddler: "I don't want to take a nap!"

Response: "You can take a nap or you can lay quietly on your bed with a book." OR "You can take a nap now or you after we read one more book."

2. **Don't back down!** Stick to your guns and give them the time they may need to make a decision. Be prepared for a potential small battle, but the benefits out-way the headaches. With your consistency, your toddler will continue to practice and strengthen their independence, you will have an easier time with their strong desire to be independent, and you will be encouraging their self-esteem!

Conflict resolution

- Redirection is best
 - With one year olds this is the only method to be used
 - With 2 and 3 year olds this is the best method
- Time-out
 - Time-out should be used when the resolution strategy is not ready to be used (ie. Children are still too angry)
 - With older children (3 year olds and up) they should let themselves out of time-out
- Goal of conflict resolution is for children not to need you as much or at all.

Problem solving technique

1. acknowledge child's feelings
2. learn what the problem is
3. learn who owns the problem
4. facilitate a solution
5. accept all solutions
6. give praise
7. evaluate the solution

Environment

- human and physical elements
- giving children outputs for energy will help channel their behavior in positive ways
- examples:
 1. wood working
 2. sensory activities (water, sand, music, etc.)
 3. proprioceptive (jumping, running, swinging, any activity to help joints and ligaments)