

The Two Year Old: An outline to the Two Year Old Talk by Dr. Cain

Introduction: The two year old is no longer a baby. His physical and motor development may be slowing but his intellectual, social and emotional changes are accelerating. His vocabulary increases as does his independence. He flip flops back and forth between extremes. He is clingy one minute when he is leaving you and then runs away when he is called. His appearance is changing too. His arms and legs are more slender now. His face is less rounded, he stands more erect and has less of the pot bellied appearance. He'll gain four pounds this year and grow another two and a half inches.

General Observations: Your two year old is eating less now because they are growing slower. Their movements are changing. Their running coordination allows them to run smoother and more fluid. They can kick

a ball and they can go up and down stairs holding onto a hand rail. Their attention span is shorter and they change their interests quickly. Their fine motor movements have improved to allow them to manipulate small objects. They can turn pages of a book, stack six blocks, unzip their zipper and pull off their shoes. They can turn a doorknob, unscrew a lid and unwrap a package. They can now draw using a thumb and finger grip that can allow them to draw vertical and circular strokes. Their attention span is long enough to allow them to do things with you; if you can keep up with them.

Language: Your two year old will possibly have a vocabulary of over fifty words and speak in three word sentences. She will pick up language from talking, from being read to, from looking at pictures, touching objects and pointing at things she enjoys. By the end of the second year she will follow two to three component commands. She will recognize common objects, understand sentences and strangers will understand her. She will begin to speak in four to five word sentences and she will say her age name and

the fact that she is a girl. She will begin to use pronouns and understand the position word of “in, on and under.”

Cognitive: Your two year old is now able to solve simple problems mentally; not just by manipulating objects. He will have an increase in his memory and he will understand the simple concept of time such as “you may play after you eat.” He will like to count and he will learn the simple shapes. Their play becomes more complex. He will begin to pretend by the end of his second year. He will also feel that everything happens because of something that he has done. Problems such as illness and divorce are not easily understood and can bring about a feeling of self blame. Reasoning is difficult; their thinking is very concrete, very literal.

Social Skills: The two year old is selfish and self centered. They may play side by side but they won't share their toys; they will snatch and quarrel. They begin to imitate mannerisms and activities such as pretending to put their

Teddy bear to bed. They can be left to play in small groups of two or three while you monitor their activities. You can let them guide their own interactions and intervene when necessary.

Emotions: The two year olds emotions are best characterized as being up and down. He is friendly one minute, crying the next and then back again to being friendly. He may overstep a limit and be pulled back resulting in anger and rage. He may strike or hit when this happens. He will often behave better around strangers than his parents because he does not trust the strangers well enough to test their limits. Conversely he knows his parent will rescue him if he crosses a dangerous boundary. The two year old needs consistent limits and praise. This will increase his self esteem. Allow the two year old to explore but draw a line at dangerous and socially unacceptable behavior. Apply your limits consistently.

Developmental Warning Signs: The following are warning signs of delayed development of the child who is age two and approaching age three. The child should not be having frequent falls or difficulty climbing stairs by age three. Excessive drooling, difficult to understand speech and the inability to stack four blocks or inability to manipulate small objects could be cause for concern. The three year old is usually able to copy a circle. They should speak in short phrases and they should be able to do pretend play. If a three year old cannot follow simple instructions or if they have interest in other children or if they have extreme difficulty separating from their mother this should be brought to the attention of their pediatrician.

Nutrition: The two year old enjoys three meals a day with one or two snacks. They eat mostly table foods. They will use a spoon and drink from a cup with one hand. They will use a fork by age three. The two year old gulps his food and therefore is a choking risk. Hotdogs should be sliced lengthwise and across to lessen the risk of choking. The two year old should not be given nuts, hard candies, whole

grapes, peanut butter in spoonfuls, raw carrots, cherries with pits and raw celery. The two year old should eat from each of the four food groups every day. These include the meat, fish and poultry group, the milk cheese and dairy group, fruits and vegetables, and cereals rice potatoes and other breads. Don't struggle. The two year old will just defy you if you force meals at meal time. Offer the foods and he or she will consume a healthy balance. The two year old will drink about 16 to 24 ounce of milk a day. More milk than this will interfere with iron absorption.

Teeth: Your child will have all his or her primary teeth in by age two and one half years. This includes the second molars. The two year old should brush their teeth at least one time a day, usually at bedtime. He should use no more than a pea sized amount of toothpaste to avoid excessive fluoride consumption. You can make tooth brushing a game such as "lets find the hidden teeth." Your child should visit the dentist by age three.

Toilet Readiness: Developing toilet habits does not have to be difficult. Pushing may delay it. Praise your child's successes and ignore their mistakes. Let your child play with the potty chair in the toy box for about one month before its first use. Let your child watch children of the same sex use the toilet. The two year old learns by imitation. Start on the bowel habits first. Urination will naturally follow. The following steps may help. Have your child sit on the potty chair fully clothed at first. Then have them sit on the chair with the diaper off one to three times a day. Change your child's diaper seated and drop the contents into the chair. Then let your child play near the potty chair and let them use it if they need to. Praise the successes and show no disappointment for errors. When your child is using the potty chair regularly switch to training pants.

Sleep: The two year old sleeps between nine and thirteen hours a day. They will take a two to three hour midday nap or two shorter naps. Do not force a nap schedule unless your child becomes irritable without the nap. At bedtime, establishing a ritual helps expectation and

transition to sleep. Some children are resistive. This could be negativism or separation anxiety. Give your child some simple controls such as “which pajamas would you like to wear?” , “which story would you like to be told?” or “which stuffed animal would you like to take with you?” Allow security objects. For separation crying, calm your child and separate ten minutes at a time until this behavior stops. For climbing out of bed immediately return your child without scolding. Nightmares are common. Calm your child until they are ready to fall asleep again. Reduce daytime stresses, such as reduce emphasis on potty training. There should be no bedtime television; instead use music and quiet reading.

Discipline: The following tips may help you with discipline and your two year old. First, always remember to reward good behavior. Be alert to prevent a problem or distract your child before the problem arises. Give an alternative. Give rules that help your child to learn to control their impulsiveness without impairing their drive for independence. Keep the developmental level in mind when

setting a limit. Use time out for destructive behavior. Don't expect your child to reason with a hypothetical such as "how would you like it if this happened to you?" Be consistent with the rules and punishments. All adults in the household should hold to the same limits. The adult must be the role model.

New Baby Expected with a Two Year Old in the house: If you are expecting a new baby and have a two year old then you can expect jealousy. Prepare a few months ahead of time by shopping for the new baby and talking about the coming of the new child. Once born, let your two year old help in simple tasks. Invite a sense of ownership and belonging.

Safety: Safety must be paramount with your two year old. Prevent falls from stairs, windows and doorways. Prevent burns from the kitchen, irons, heaters, plugs and curling irons. Prevent poisoning by keeping all medications locked up and out of the way. Avoid exposure to harmful household products. Simple liquids such as automatic dishwasher soap and furniture polish can be quite harmful. Avoid poisonous items in the garage. Always have your poison control number readily available. For the Tacoma area it is (800) 222-1222. If you own firearms, keep them separated from their ammunition and secured with a trigger lock, and a lock box or gun safe. In the car always use a car seat and never behind an air bag.