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How Kids Develop – Training Manual
Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
Building Strong Families
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Building Strong Families: Parenting Young Children

How Kids Develop Training Manual

Developed and produced by
Extension Home Economics
Cooperative Extension Service
Michigan State University
# Building Strong Families: Parenting Young Children

"How Kids Develop"

## Contents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newborn to Three Months</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowel Movements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thumb Sucking</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senses: Need for Stimulation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colic</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four to Six Months</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasping</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolling Over</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding Solid Foods</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle Feeding</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seven to Twelve Months</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teething</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babbling</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawling, Pulling, Climbing</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropping and Throwing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twelve to Twenty-Four Months</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet Training</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picky Eaters</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twenty-Four to Thirty-Six Months</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet Training</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thumb Sucking</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressing Self</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biting</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttering</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed Wetting</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Twos&quot;</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Newborn to Three Months: Eating

The only food a new baby needs is milk. Babies can be either breast fed or bottle fed. Most women who breast-feed can produce enough milk for their babies. Breast-feeding has many advantages. It is nature's original "fast food" and is more convenient and less expensive than formula. The first few feedings contain a yellowish fluid called colostrum. Colostrum and early breast milk are high in certain proteins and zinc, which give the baby immunity from various bacteria and viruses that enter the intestine.

It's in the baby's interest to support the mother in whatever decision she makes. It is our educational responsibility to provide a mother with the relative merits of each type of feeding and help her understand her feelings in this area.

Mothers on medication must check with their doctors to see if it is all right to breast feed while taking medication. Alcohol, amphetamines, and other drugs are transferred to the baby through breast milk. Cocaine is also passed through breast milk. Any of these drugs can harm the baby.

If the mother chooses to bottle feed, have her ask her doctor which formula is best for her baby. Formula can be purchased at the grocery store. For the first six to nine months the baby should not drink cow's milk, including Vitamin D milk, skim milk, or any other milk that adults and older children drink. Do not use evaporated milk, even when watered down. Older babies and children usually can drink cow's milk, but from birth to six to nine months, a baby's system cannot handle it.

When the formula is mixed, sterilize the bottles and nipples. Keep formula refrigerated after it is mixed. If it is kept at room temperature too long, germs and bacteria will grow. Never reuse a bottle without washing and sterilizing it. The baby can get sick from an unclean bottle.

Thrush infection can be caused from an unclean bottle. The symptoms of thrush infection include little white sores in the baby's mouth and sometimes on his gums which may bleed a little. The baby should see a doctor, but in the meantime he could be given half an ounce of cooled, boiled water.
Newborn to Three Months: Bowel Movements

Babies usually have several bowel movements a day. Their bowel movements do not look like adult bowel movements. A breast fed baby's bowel movement is usually a light yellow color and may be pasty or runny like thick cream soup. A bottle fed baby's bowel movement sometimes looks like scrambled eggs.

A baby has diarrhea when his bowel movements become frequent and watery. Sometimes it is greenish looking. Diarrhea can be caused by diet or a dirty bottle or the bottle's nipple.

Diarrhea can also happen when there is an infection, so the baby may have a fever and may be vomiting. Diarrhea, vomiting, and fever can cause the baby to lose body fluids and become dehydrated. This is dangerous for an infant this young.

If an infant has diarrhea, feed him about two ounces of liquid every hour. If he refuses to drink his normal breast milk or formula, try watered down formula or plain water. To tell if an infant is dehydrated, check to see if his mouth is dry and if he is wetting as often and as much as usual. If he is wetting less or his mouth is dry, continue to try to get him to take liquids. If he will not take liquids, call the doctor.
Newborn to Three Months: Sleep

New babies sleep from feeding to feeding. Often they cannot tell the difference between night and day. They spend most of a twenty-four hour day sleeping and waking up only to eat and to have their diapers changed. But each baby is different and sleeps different hours. Because new babies sleep and wake up often, parents have a hard time getting regular sleep.

Eventually babies start sleeping all night. When the baby is about a month old he will start sleeping for longer periods of time.

Most babies sleep through the night when they are three-months-old or when they weigh twelve pounds.

Mothers who are not allowed to get much sleep may get angry and upset easier because they are so tired. They need to take it easy and try not to do too much. Their awake time activities should be kept simple. Encourage them to take naps when their babies sleep and to seek help from family or friends when they are very tired.
Newborn to Three Months: Sucking

Sucking is very important to babies. They will suck anything that comes to their lips. Some babies suck their thumbs before they are born and others start after they are born. Not only does sucking help babies get food and nourishment, it also helps babies explore and learn about objects.

Babies and young children may go on sucking their thumbs or pacifiers until their permanent teeth come in at around six years of age. Sucking a pacifier, thumb, or fingers is a way that a young infant has to comfort himself. It will not hurt his thumb or mouth. The need for sucking usually goes away on its own, especially if the parent does not try to make the child give it up.
Newborn to Three Months: 
Senses, The Need for Stimulation

New babies can do more things during the first few months than most people realize. For example, they can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel minutes after birth. (They can even hear before they are born!) These senses need to be exercised in order for them to develop at a normal rate. Babies can see about eight inches from their faces right after they are born, but normal vision takes a while. Babies can also cry right away, and at about one month they begin to make other noises, such as cooing.
Newborn to Three Months: Crying

Crying is a baby’s way of asking for help. All babies cry, some more than others. Some take longer to soothe than others. Crying is a natural way for babies to communicate that they are uncomfortable. Any crying is a form of communication, and responding to these cries helps build a close, trusting relationship.

Because crying indicates a need, it is important to respond right away. This will not spoil the baby. At this age they are too young to understand intention and consequences. If their needs are met and they are made comfortable, they will realize that they can depend on the parent. Bell and Ainsworth, two researchers on infant crying, found that newborn babies who were picked up when they cried, cried less than babies who were not picked up, once they were a year old. These babies at twelve months also had a greater variety of ways to express their needs and tended to have more secure attachments than those babies who were allowed to cry. When they did cry it was short bursts rather than loud, long cries. Thus, when babies’ cries are answered they learn to trust their caregivers and the rest of the world. However, answering the early cries does not mean they will never cry, but will probably cry less.

A baby has different cries that express different feelings and sensations. There are a few distinct cries that are common:

“T’m hurting” - When babies are in pain, they cry in an unmistakable way. It usually begins as a shrill scream, followed by a silent period and a series of short gasps. Then it is repeated.

“T’m hungry” - This cry starts slowly and builds to a loud, demanding rhythm. Food is usually the first thing thought of when a hunger cry is heard. Even if the infant just finished nursing she may still want a snack. If the infant has the hunger cry, but does not want food, she may be “hungering” for the caregiver’s attention and stimulation. Infants need attention as well as food at feeding time.

“T’m upset” - The mild, fussy cry may appear when the infant is tired or in a bad mood. If this fussing is ignored, the louder it becomes. It usually sounds more forced than the hunger cry. Infants will also cry to show discomfort, anger, and other physical and emotional states.
Newborn to Three Months: Colic

Colic does not affect all infants. But babies with colic cry because of pain in their stomachs. The piercing, prolonged crying occurs about the same time each day, usually early evening. About 20% of all babies suffer from colic.

Although the exact cause of colic is unknown, there are various theories. For example, some believe it can be several things: an immature digestive system; assorted allergies, especially to cow's milk; maternal hormones transmitted through breast milk; the baby eating too much or too little; or tension in the family. Others feel that it is only a label given to any baby who cries a lot.

A colicky baby will cry when she is held and when she is lying down. Colic continues usually until the infant is three or four months old.
Four to Six Months: Grasping

Babies at this age have a voluntary grasp which is clumsy at first but gradually improves as they get older. They can now hold on to things they want, not just things placed in their hands. Voluntary grasping gives them great pleasure. During this time they will reach for nearby objects. To reach and grasp is quite a complicated process involving eye-hand coordination. To achieve eye-hand coordination is a major accomplishment for an infant. It not only enables them to explore actively, but it is fundamental to many other skills that they will need throughout life.

Now that they can grasp things and have begun eye-hand coordination, they will put things in their mouths. This is also a way of exploring objects.

Because babies usually put objects in their mouths, do not give toys that are sharp, can break, come apart, or that are small enough to be swallowed. Babies learn about their world by putting things in their mouths. It is their way of feeling. Clean safe objects over 1 1/2 inches square can be given to them to handle and explore.
Four to Six Months: Rolling Over

As the baby's back, neck, and limbs become stronger, he may be able to suddenly roll over. Most babies begin rolling over from back to stomach around four or five months. At first they will rock up onto their sides and roll on to their backs. With more practice they can roll over. This ability gives them better control and opportunities for exploring. They can get in a better position for examining the environment and can roll to get closer to things they want to see or handle.

It is important to be careful with a baby this age who may not be rolling over, because they may begin rolling over at anytime.

- Always keep the crib sides locked and lower the crib mattress at least a notch.
- Strap the baby in an infant seat. Do not place the seat near the edge of a table or counter or any other above-the-floor surface. If the baby wriggles at all he could capsize his seat.
- Never leave the baby on a raised surface when you leave the room.
- Never leave the baby alone on a couch, changing table or bed.
- Never leave the baby alone in his bath.
- Strap him securely in his stroller and car seat.
Four to Six Months: Solid Foods

The digestive system of infants can better handle solid foods around five to six months. They are beginning to drool which helps them to swallow easier. They are becoming able to swallow solids by moving them from the front to the rear of the mouth with their tongues. Young babies under four months will gag on solid foods. Gagging is a reflex they are born with. It helps them from choking if an object gets too far back in their mouths.

They are now old enough to show the desire to eat by leaning forward and opening their mouths to take another bite.

The best first solid food is rice cereal mixed with formula or breast milk. After a few weeks try finely mashed fruits and vegetables such as peaches, applesauce, peas, sweet potatoes, or squash.

Some tips on introducing solid foods:

- Use a small spoon at first and hold it a little inside the baby's lips so the baby can suck in the food. If he has trouble with the spoon he could suck the food off his mother's clean finger the first few times.

- For the first meal of the day when the baby is exceptionally hungry, he probably will not take the spoon with the solid food. Give milk first in order to reduce hunger. Then give solids on a spoon.

- For the first meals with solids, alternate between liquids and solids. Most of the baby's nutrients still come from milk.

- Because the infant's saliva causes the food to break down, do not feed him directly from a jar. If he does not finish the entire jar it will have to be discarded (his saliva will be passed to the food on the spoon). It is best to put food in a dish and if any remains, throw it away.
Four to Six Months: Bottle Feeding

A baby still needs to be held during feeding to feel secure and loved, but there are other reasons for holding a baby while bottle feeding.

A baby can choke on the liquid in the bottle if not watched. If a baby is lying flat, the liquid can run into the ear tubes and cause ear infections which are not only painful for the baby but are expensive to have treated.

Too often a bottle containing sweetened liquids is misused as a pacifier to comfort the infant or control behavior. This practice can lead to a condition called “bottle mouth” in which the teeth of infants and preschoolers are destroyed by tooth decay. Bottle mouth is severe tooth decay caused by too much bottle nursing outside of normal feeding times. Bottle mouth occurs when a baby nurses too frequently and for long periods of time, such as when the bottle is used like a pacifier or when a baby is put to bed with a bottle at night or at naptime. It can also occur when the baby is given sweetened liquids like sugar water and soft drinks, like pop and Kool-Aid. Often the tooth decay does not show up until months or years after a baby’s teeth start coming in.

Decay happens when sugar mixes with plaque (a sticky, colorless film on the teeth). Together they form an acid that attacks the tooth enamel. Not only are sweetened drinks possible acid-makers but even formula, milk, and fruit juices contain sugar. The longer the liquid stays around the baby’s teeth the greater the chance for decay. That is why it is so harmful to use the bottle like a pacifier.
Seven to Twelve Months: Teething

The average infant cuts teeth around 6 1/2 months. Cutting teeth is probably not nearly as uncomfortable for babies as many people think. Fussiness and crankiness during this time are not necessarily due to cutting teeth. A baby who is running a temperature, vomits, does not eat, and/or rubs his ears is ill. So it is important that a mother does not ignore these symptoms and assume they are due to teething.

If, however, the baby really seems restless and irritable when cutting a tooth and has no symptoms of illness, then a chewing toy might relieve the uncomfortable feeling. Chewing is good for babies anyway. Some babies like cool things in their mouths. Some teething rings have a gel filling which cools and holds its low temperature if placed in the refrigerator beforehand.

It is important that a mother not put ice or rub unwrapped ice on affected gums. It could cause damage to the covering of the gum because the ice is too cold. Instead, the mother could dip her fingers in ice cold water and rub her baby's gums.

Do not rub teething gel on an infant's gums unless recommended by a doctor. Some of these gels contain local anesthetics that may harm an infant. Some have aspirin-like chemicals which could overdose the baby. Some contain alcohol while others contain sugar.
Seven to Twelve Months: Babbling

Babies babble at this age. Babbling is an important milestone in language development. The baby makes sounds that combine vowels and consonants such as "babababa" or "mamamamama" or "dadada-dada". Babbling helps develop the muscles of the sound producing apparatus, and when the infant associates certain movements of the throat, tongue, and lips with certain sounds, the new skill is practiced. There is a relationship between babbling and later speech.

It is important that a parent responds to her infant's vocal sounds. An infant can begin to connect sounds with meanings if the parent responds to the babbling. This is an important step in communicating with sounds that leads to the development of language.

The parent can help by imitating the sounds the baby makes and talking to the baby often. She can play pat-a-cake and encourage talking by talking to the baby and pausing to give the baby a chance to answer. Even if the baby responds in ways other than babbling, like smiling or arm waving, the lesson that conversations are a "two-way street" is learned. Also repeating words is helpful, such as, "look, look", or ending words with an "ee" sound such as "doggie" or "kitty". It is important to speak clearly so she can hear each word.
Seven to Twelve Months: Fears

Stranger anxiety and separation anxiety become evident during this age. Stranger anxiety is the negative response to an unfamiliar adult. Separation anxiety refers to crying, fretting, and other distressed behavior expressed by an infant when her parent or other significant person leaves. Stranger and separation anxiety are thought to be the first real negative emotions of a baby. The baby can now tell the difference between parents and other people.
Seven to Twelve Months: Crawls, Pulls Self Up, Walks Around Things, and Climbs

Babies begin to crawl around eight months. Next they start pulling themselves up by hanging on to furniture. Between eleven and twelve months most babies begin to walk while holding on to furniture such as the sofa, or other low sturdy objects. Some babies can even climb before they can walk around objects.
Seven to Twelve Months: Feeding

The very beginning of self-feeding emerges during this period. Babies have fairly good arm and hand skills and they show a genuine interest in taking part at meal times such as grabbing for their spoons or trying to pick up bits of food. These attempts should be encouraged.

Self-feeding is closely related to the development of fine motor skills (being able to use their fingers). The better an infant can grasp a small chunk of food, the more likely he will get it in his mouth. First, an infant will grasp his food using his thumb and two or more fingers. Then he can grasp his smaller bits of food using a pincer grasp, that is, using only the thumb and first finger.

Foods that are soft and crumbly are best. Infants are less likely to choke on them. It is best to avoid berries, citrus fruits, wheat grains, corn, peanut butter, fish, and egg whites at this age because many babies are allergic to them.
Seven to Twelve Months: Drops and Throws Things

Babies love to drop and throw things. Babies not only need practice holding objects, they also need practice releasing them when and where they want. They can practice without having to be accurate. They enjoy practicing this new releasing ability again and again. After they start throwing things they find that different objects move different ways and make different sounds when they land. Thus dropping and throwing provides a way to learn more about an object's properties.
Twelve to Twenty-Four Months: Toilet Training

A few months after the first birthday, babies may become aware of when a bowel movement occurs. However, they are not yet ready to actually become toilet trained. Girls usually learn toileting around two years of age and boys at around two and a half years. Toilet training is more complicated than most people believe. Toddlers must be aware before they are about to urinate or have a bowel movement. They must be able to communicate the need to use the toilet and they must be able to get their clothes off. They must also be able to sit on the toilet and relax to freely urinate and have a bowel movement.

An infant at twelve to twenty-four months generally does not have the maturity to control his bladder and bowel movements. It is best for the infant and the mother to wait until the infant is mature enough.
Twelve to Twenty-Four Months: Walking

Most babies learn to walk between twelve and fifteen months. Some start at nine months and others at eighteen months. Before babies start walking they usually have pulled themselves to standing with support of their crib, playpen, furniture, or other anchor. They take trial excursions around furniture, or other items, which helps them learn to balance as well as strengthen their legs. Babies display a great variety of individuality in their early walking stages. Some take off right away and are not intimidated by falls. Others are slightly put off by the inevitable mishaps and are slower in starting. Some take slow and deliberate steps by lifting their legs high into the air and bringing them down cautiously with long pauses in between. Others take running steps and then topple over.

When a baby learns to walk alone depends on several factors. These include how well she can get to places by crawling so she does not need to walk, if she has been ill, and/or had bad experiences, such as falling hard, when she first tried to walk.
Twelve to Twenty-Four Months: Picky Eaters

Babies this age do not eat as much as they did a few months ago. A smaller appetite is typical and understandable. If they ate at the same rate as when they were younger, they would become overweight. The size of the appetite depends on the rate of growth, which slows dramatically around the first birthday. A baby's birth weight is typically doubled by four or five months of age and then triples by the end of the first year. However, between twelve and thirty months the toddler gains only six to eight pounds. Thus, appetite diminishes because growth is slower.

Emerging independence also contributes to being a picky eater. They are developing their own likes and dislikes. Also, typical active toddlers get too impatient to sit still for a whole meal. They would rather be walking and exploring.

Parents are often concerned that their child is not getting enough to eat. They can create some real eating problems by being rigid and insisting that the toddler eat everything they give him.

Self feeding is messy but it helps a baby learn. Healthy finger foods and a cup that has a lid with a spout for milk, juice, or water will make mealtimes more pleasant.

Good finger foods include soft peeled fruit, well-done cooked vegetables, mild cheese, cooked egg yolk, soft round crackers, teething biscuits, pieces of toast or tortilla and small pieces of banana. Do not give babies foods like raw carrots, celery, popcorn, nuts, raisins, cherries, or whole or cut hot dogs. A baby can easily choke on these foods.
Toward the end of the first year most babies still take two naps a day. Between twelve and eighteen months of age they will probably give up one nap. They usually sleep through the night at this age, and they need to have a regular bed time.

Babies need to be put to bed at about the same time every night. All babies need a regular time to go to sleep and a good night's sleep, which means eight to eleven hours of uninterrupted sleep.

Not only is a regular bedtime routine important for the baby, it also benefits the parents. Parents need the privacy and time to unwind. They need time to themselves and simple relief from an active toddler.
Twelve to Twenty-Four Months: Independence

Twelve to twenty-fourth month olds are learning to stand up for themselves and assert their independence. They are developing a better sense of themselves as people separate from their parents. This is an important stage for a young child. They will say "no" often, even when it is something they want to do. Often they will also say "mine" or "me do it".

All children need to go through this stage of learning to be independent. Toddlers still need to be hugged and feel loved. They are not being obstinate to irritate their parents. Parents need to be patient. Their toddlers are growing up. Spanking, hitting, shaking, or pinching are not necessary to discipline. Such punishment may permanently injure such a young child. It also teaches the child to be sneaky, aggressive, and fearful. It also teaches hurting and hitting others is okay.

Some ideas to help the parent and toddler with this new independence include:

- When your toddler is being good, praise him. He will learn he can get attention when he is good, so he won't have to be bad to get attention.
- Tell him what he can or should do, not what he can't or shouldn't do. Say: "Hold your kitty this way" NOT "Don't hold your kitty like that!"
- Take toys or special snack treats on trips to prevent hunger, crankiness, or boredom.
- Remove things you do not want him to touch.
- Be sure he gets enough rest so he won't get cranky or fussy.
- Tell him what you want him to do. Don't ask him if he really does not have a choice.
- If he is doing something you don't want him to do, give him a substitute, for example, "You can pour water in the sink, not on the floor."
Twelve to Twenty-Four Months: Accidents

Now that babies get around easily they are more likely to have accidents. More children die and more children are permanently injured from accidents than from all diseases combined. Babies need protection from accidents; they are too young to protect themselves.
Twenty-Four to Thirty-Six Months: Toilet Training

Most girls are ready for toilet training around two years, while most boys are ready around two and one-half years. Children usually become interested in learning to use the toilet on their own. A child sized potty on the floor can help them get started.

Don't rush toilet training. There are different ways to prepare a toddler for toilet training.

- Teach the words to ask to go to the toilet. When you change diapers say "You wet your diapers" or "You messed your diapers."

- Show and tell her the words for "toilet" or "potty" or whatever word you want her to use.

- Suggest sitting on the potty several times a day without diapers. Likely times might be while you run the bath water, right after a meal, after a nap, or any time the child has been dry for a long period of time.

- Dress the child in loose fitting clothes and training pants.

- Stay in the bathroom with the child.

- Don't give her toys to play with while on the potty.

- Don't make the child sit on the toilet when she wants to get off, even if she has not done anything.

- Always praise when the child does do something. For example, "Wow, look what you did!"

- Remind the child how nice it feels not to wear dirty diapers.

- Don't criticize or punish accidents.
Sucking a thumb, finger, or a pacifier are common ways for toddlers to comfort themselves. Such sucking reduces the tensions toddlers feel as they grow up. They have far more conflicts and pressures to deal with than they did when they were younger.

Some professionals believe that if a child is not allowed to suck his thumb or fingers he may have problems sleeping or even wetting the bed.

Thumb sucking usually disappears on its own, especially if a big deal is not made about it. It is best not to pull children's thumbs and fingers out of their mouths. Parents are concerned that sucking will ruin their children's teeth, but problems with teeth usually occur after the permanent teeth come in around five or six years of age. Even then casual thumb sucking does not affect teeth.

As the child gets older the mother might distract the child if he is sucking his thumb or fingers by giving him something to do with his hands.
Toddlers wish to be independent and to do things by themselves. Dressing themselves is important to them. They begin to try to undress themselves around twelve to eighteen months of age. By twenty-four months they can take off their clothes by themselves. However, they often get tangled up when they try to put on their clothes. By thirty-six months they can put on easy clothes. But it is not until four or five years that they can handle shoelaces or buttons.

Parents can get easily frustrated dealing with toddlers who wish to dress themselves. Some pointers include:

- Encourage them to do the things for themselves that they are capable of doing.
- Let them do what they can and help with whatever gives them trouble.
- Give them a start and let them finish. For example, pull the sock on part way and let the child pull it on the rest of the way.
- Lay out the piece of clothing the way it should go on so the child can start the right way.
- Say “What a big girl (boy)” she is if the child does it right.
- Don’t punish or make fun if it’s done wrong.
Twenty-Four to Thirty-Six Months: Biting

At about one year of age children will sometimes bite others. Usually they are teething and it makes their gums feel better. Sometimes they bite because they are tired. Around twenty-four to thirty months they may bite occasionally even if they are generally happy and good natured. However, if toddlers bite often for no apparent reason, and are usually tense or unhappy, there may be a problem.

Do not bite the child back. Biting or slapping a child for biting lets the child believe it is okay to bite or slap.

Some of the reasons toddlers bite:

- They may be bossed or spanked too much.

- They may not be accustomed to being around other small children and may be afraid of them and see them as more dangerous or powerful.

- They may be jealous of a new baby or may resent all small children.

Ways to prevent or stop biting:

- Don't let the child bite you or anyone else. Say firmly, "No, biting hurts."

- Take the child to a quiet safe place, look the child in the eyes and say, "Stay here until you are calmer, I cannot let you bite." After a minute or two, ask, "Are you ready to play again without biting?" If the answer is "yes", let the child go back to playing.

- You can also teach better ways of showing anger. Tell the child that when angry the child should say, "Stop that", "Go away", or "I don't like that."

- When the child substitutes words for hurting, praise the child with words and hugs. As the child learns to express feelings through words, biting (and hitting) will stop.
Twenty-Four to Thirty-Six Months: Stuttering

Toddlers are learning language at a fast pace. They learn about ten to fifteen new words a week. Sometimes their ideas get ahead of their vocabulary and they find it difficult to express themselves. When their thoughts or ideas get ahead of their words, they start to stutter. This is especially true if they are excited or upset.

Most stuttering done by a two or three-year-old rarely becomes real stuttering. Adults need to accept the talk or speech calmly so that the child is unaware that it is in any way inadequate. Therefore, the child will not have to think about how things are said. The stuttering will gradually disappear.
Most 30 to 36 month old children stay dry during the day but may wet at night until after their third birthdays. Some children wet their beds even after they are five-years-old. All children should be given the opportunity to mature into nighttime dryness at their own pace.

Parents cannot do much about nighttime wetting since the child's body is not mature enough to stop it. These toddlers do not want to wet the bed. They simply cannot hold their urine, wake up, and get to the toilet at night.

Some possible suggestions for parents:

- Don't yell or spank for bedwetting. It only makes matters worse. If the child is scared and nervous, the likelihood of bedwetting increases.
- Use heavy night diapers.
- As the child gets older, use training pants covered by waterproof pants.
- Keep a waterproof mattress pad on the bed.
- Make sure the child goes to the toilet before bedtime.
- Try to relax and be understanding.
- Praise the child for success, and be calm when there is an accident.
Twenty-Four to Thirty-Six Months: "Twos"

Often this stage is called the "Terrible Twos". However, we are trying to encourage parents to view their children in a positive way. Therefore, this section is simply called "Twos". This age group is trying to learn to be independent, but if this attempt is thwarted they become frustrated and have temper tantrums. Temper tantrums are also related to maturation changes that are occurring in the brain at this time, which make a child more easily frustrated.

Almost all toddlers between one and three years have temper tantrums once in a while. A temper tantrum once in a while does not mean anything. However, if it becomes routine, there may be a problem. The child may have a chronic physical problem or may be overly tired. Or perhaps the parent does not know how to deal with the child's developing independence and insists on doing things for the child when he could do it himself.

Children this age need the opportunity to do things for themselves. Of course, the parent needs to provide a framework within which the child can work. For example, if the child wants to pour his own milk on his cereal, the parent could put the milk in a small pitcher or glass and let him pour it.

When a tantrum does erupt, the best way to handle it is for the parent to ignore it and walk away (make sure he is safe). Don't give in to the child. If it occurs in a public place, let him cool down. It is unwise for the parent to get angry and lose their temper too. He probably has frightened himself by his loss of self control and will be even more frightened if the parent loses self control too.