



Oh Baby
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TODDLER +
 UNDER 5

TOD TALKS

The toddler years are a time of great cognitive, emotional and social development. We asked experts to weigh in on what you can expect.



SLEEP & THE BUSY TODDLER

OhBaby! sleep expert Dorothy Waide shares her advice on helping your active toddler get the rest he needs.

We spend many hours wondering what is the right amount of sleep for our children. It is important to remember, however, that every child is different and any suggestions we discuss are guidelines for parents to work with – they are not set in stone.

For toddlers aged one to three, I would recommend approximately 12 hours for night-time sleep and one daytime sleep of around 1½ to 2½ hours. It's time to change the length of their daytime sleep when they start to take longer to fall asleep at night, or start waking in the night when they have normally slept right through.

nap capers

When toddlers are ready to drop their daily nap, it is important to remember that all children are individuals, therefore there is no one-size-fits-all solution to address this. If your toddler is having a long day nap that has started to affect their night sleep, then I suggest reducing the day nap by between 15 and 30 minutes. If this then brings the night-time routine back to normal, then I would hold there until I needed to shorten again. Otherwise, I would hold for 10 days and then reduce the nap again until I found a length that allows the evening bedtime routine to go back to normal. Over time I would continue to reduce a toddler's naps until he is having a short nap of between 30 minutes and one hour.

Another strategy is to just drop the nap altogether and have a quiet time. The time frame for a quiet time will differ from toddler to toddler, but I suggest around 30 minutes. This could be just sitting on the sofa cuddling and reading books or watching an educational programme on television. Some toddlers are even happy to just lie on their bed and have a quiet time.

Once a child has dropped his daytime nap, I find that every so often he will need a catch-up nap, or a 'band-aid' as I like to call them. A band-aid nap would be less than 30 minutes.

night-time woes

The hardest time to get a toddler to bed is during daylight saving, as they cannot understand why they need to go to bed when the sun is still shining. Having a good bedtime routine will help. This means allowing enough time for your child to have their evening meal and prepare for bed, so as to avoid rushing through this time and adding to the stress.

Good black-out blinds are a must and I tend to make a child's room 'night-time' dark before taking him into his bedroom to tuck him in bed for the night. Then, with a little magic and imagination, you can encourage your child by discussing how lucky he is that night-time is already in his room, making him feel very special so he happily hops into bed.

For other children it is not quite so simple, but consistently following the same bedtime routine will help all children understand what is expected, avoiding too many fallouts.

If your child is one who needs a drink, snack or an extra cuddle every night, then remind him before he goes to bed that this is his last time to have what he's requesting and once he's in bed, any requests are no longer available as it is time to go to sleep. You then need to follow through with what you have said.

Whatever changes you are making to bedtime routines, bear in mind that results certainly won't happen overnight. However, consistency, clear instructions and not giving too much verbal attention after you have said goodnight will definitely help you to get to your goal of a battle-free bedtime.

Sam starts

I find the two most common reasons why toddlers consider 5am time to start the day are the outside world waking up or the light creeping in around the sides of their curtains.

Having good black-out blinds is essential. A black-out blind or curtain prevents any light from creeping in around the sides, top or bottom of the windows.

If you live somewhere with early morning outside noise (cars leaving early, dogs barking, birds singing, etc), you could have white noise timed to come on before dawn and see if this makes a difference.

Another option worth trying is a sleep training clock with an easy-to-read signal that shows your child when it is an acceptable time to get up.

Kid Sleep Moon Trainer clock,
\$79.95, thesleepstore.co.nz





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FUSSY EATING

Fussy eating is a phase common to toddlerhood. The following tips, coupled with parental patience, are designed to make mealtimes a positive experience – as opposed to a food fight.

Some days your toddler seems to live on fresh air alone but try not to worry – healthy toddlers have good appetite regulation and usually eat what they need to.

Drinking too much milk is a common reason for fussy eating, as milk can fill up toddler tummies and ruin appetites for other important foods. Offer milk after a meal, and limit to two cups per day (around 500 ml) so your toddler is hungry at mealtimes.

Often toddlers reject savoury foods, which are high in iron and other essential nutrients. Iron is essential for healthy growth and development and if your toddler is low in iron they become tired, prone to infections and may even have difficulty learning. Make sure you offer your toddler a good variety of foods rich in iron every day, including meat, chicken, fish, legumes (e.g. baked beans) and green leafy vegetables.

If your toddler is a particularly fussy eater, an iron-enriched toddler milk drink (instead of cow's milk) can be useful. Toddler milk drinks are based on cow's milk but contain additional nutrients, including iron. One cup of a toddler milk drink can provide a good amount of your toddler's daily iron requirements, providing a great boost in addition to a balanced diet.

Toddlers, like babies, may continue to reject new foods when they are first offered, but keep offering small portions of a wide variety of food, and encourage repeated tastings. Be a good role model too. Your toddler will benefit from seeing you eat a range of healthy food and will similarly be influenced if they hear you say "Brussels sprouts are gross".

If a meal is refused, let your child sit quietly at the table for a few minutes before getting down. Don't offer alternatives to replace the uneaten food or your child will come to expect this.

Let your child explore food by touching it, and expect some mess! Likewise, let your child feed themselves, offering help if needed. Mealtimes are all about learning. Eat together as a family whenever possible – this will make mealtimes more enjoyable, as well as providing opportunity to lead by example.

the good stuff

While New Zealand nutrition guidelines recommend that adults eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day, because toddlers are smaller, the guidelines suggest around four servings (roughly a handful) – and it all counts: fresh, frozen, and canned (without sugar).

Here are a few creative ideas for getting more fruit and vegies into your toddler's diet.

- Freeze it – freeze berries or a banana and blend with some milk to make a mini smoothie.
- Adapt it – add fruit and vegies into your existing recipes. Grated or mashed fruit works well in pikelets and chopped vegies are tasty in an omelette.
- Dip it – serve a tasty spread or dip with fruit or vegetable sticks, instead of crackers.
- Mix it – grated pumpkin or pureed cauliflower work well as thickeners for soups or casseroles. They also add a little sweetness that your toddler is sure to appreciate.
- Add to it – add extras to your toddler's ready-made meals. A little grated carrot or some mashed vegies can give extra flavour and texture.

Tips adapted from information supplied by Heinz Wattie's nutritionists.



CUPFULS OF GOODNESS

While it can be tricky to get toddlers to eat food that is good for them, a brightly coloured smoothie is a whole different story! Try these nutritious smoothie recipes – perfect for the summer months and developed with the help of Heinz Wattie's nutritionist Penny Bailey, especially for your toddler.

GREEN

- 1 Wattie's Pear, Orange & Pineapple pouch
 - Small handful of baby spinach
 - ¼ ripe avocado
 - ½ cup canned pineapple chunks (in juice not syrup, reserving the juice)
 - ¼ cup pineapple juice (reserved from the can)
 - 1 tsp honey (optional if little one's taste buds find pineapple too tart)
 - ½ cup coconut water or plain water
 - 6 ice cubes
- Makes one large glass, enough to share with your toddler*

BERRY

- 1 Wattie's Apple, Blueberry & Strawberry pouch
 - ½ banana
 - ¼ cup fresh strawberries
 - ¼ cup frozen raspberries
 - ¼ small raw beetroot, peeled (optional)
 - 1 tsp chia seeds (optional)
 - 1-2 tsp honey (optional, depending on sweetness of strawberries)
 - ½ cup whole milk for toddlers aged one to two years, reduced/low fat milk for those over two years. Coconut milk can also be used.
 - 6 ice cubes
- Makes one large glass, enough to share with your toddler*

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LET'S PLAY SCHOOL

Toddlerhood heralds a whole new phase of learning and development. Before you know it, the door opens on early childhood education and your child heads off to preschool. Barbs Tozer, Communications Manager for Kindercare Learning Centres, shares her advice on transitioning your toddler into preschool or childcare.

Your child will deal with the changes of being in a new environment in their own way and in their own time. He will need your support and patience, and lots of love and reassurance to settle into a new childcare setting. Whether you're placing your little one in care for the first time, or changing your current childcare arrangement, it's helpful for parents to know as much as possible about the centre so as to make an informed decision about which care provider works best for your family. This will also help you deal with the transition confidently, and make the experience as exciting as possible for your child. Ideally it's best to plan several transition visits before leaving your child on their own at a new care provider or ECE centre. These visits give you and your child an opportunity to:

- Become a little more familiar with the environment.
- Get to know names and faces of the staff.
- Spend some time observing the room – routines, atmosphere, interactions between teachers and children, how engaged and settled the other children are.
- Get down on the floor and enjoy some activities with your child. Children take their cues from you so if you're relaxed and having fun, your child will be positively influenced to do the same.
- Chat to the staff and watch how they connect with your child. Do they make an effort to build a relationship with your child and encourage them to participate in activities?
- Chat with your child about what the other children are doing. Suggest he joins in with an activity when he's comfortable doing so. Talk with him about making friends and give him time to ask you questions or express how he is feeling.

How many transition visits your child needs, how he responds to his new environment and the teachers, and how confident he feels to explore on his own will depend on his individual nature. Some children can be left on the second visit for a short time while you pop out for a coffee, others may take a couple of visits before you feel comfortable leaving them. Talk with the staff at the centre to ensure that you know their policy on dealing with your child should they become distressed – and always ensure that staff have a contact number for you so that you can be reached immediately.

Most importantly, always say goodbye to your child happily and confidently – even if you are struggling with leaving him. While there are times when it may be tempting to 'slip away' when your child is occupied and happy, discovering you have disappeared shakes his trust and sense of security. And remember to assure your child that you'll be coming back to pick him up at the end of the day, or after morning tea/lunch, and that you can't wait to hear about his day and all the fun he has had.

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LITTLE ANGELS

The toddler years are hugely significant when it comes to development. As parents say bye-bye to babyhood, toddlerhood brings with it a whole new raft of excitement, new skills and new challenges!

First things first when talking about toddlers – it is important to avoid labels. ‘Terrible twos’, for example, is a common but unhelpful phrase used to describe our little angels as they navigate the rocky path of toddlerhood. Miriam McCaleb (in her article *Who are you calling terrible?*, issue 17 of *OhBaby! Magazine*) warns of the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy when labelling toddler behaviour, especially within a toddler’s earshot. Toddlers are faced with a range of developmental tasks, Miriam explains, and as parents we need to keep our expectations realistic. Toddlers may have made some obvious progress in physical development, now that they can get themselves around, but they have a long way to go regarding the more complex world of understanding relationships, emotions and identity. Miriam’s advice: take on the role of coach as a parent – always encouraging, clear and patient.

Our resident baby whisperer, Dorothy Waide, has also had plenty of experience ‘whispering’ to toddlers. Again, Dorothy reminds us that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing behaviour and it is important to consider a child’s temperament (see our temperament guide in issue 31) when trying to avoid meltdowns. What some children find irritating is no big deal to others. “My favourite expression is ‘don’t sweat the small stuff’. This is especially relevant when caring for toddlers. I also always work on a scale of one to ten – one being things that don’t matter at all, ten being dire straits. When we really think about it, most of the challenges routinely faced in parenting young children sit around five or lower” says Dorothy.

“Try and look at it from a toddler’s point of view. If they want to wear pyjamas all day, is it really an issue? No, it’s not. The only reason we let it become an issue is that we don’t want our toddlers doing something that isn’t seen as correct. It is amazing how we parent due to social pressures” observes Dorothy.

Dorothy’s strategy is to avoid ultimatums and instead work with your child, allowing him to feel like he has won the battle (when in reality victory belongs to the parent). For example, cleaning teeth – most toddlers don’t want to do this and a battle quickly ensues. Instead of battling, why not ask “Who’s going to get to the bathroom first to clean their teeth?” Most toddlers like to win so off they race. Perhaps your toddler refuses to put a hat on to go outside. Offer him two choices of hat – he experiences the power of choice, and you have a child wearing a hat. “It helps to really know your child’s personality and what matters to him. When I work with the principle of choices for something like getting dressed, I’d always offer choices of outfits that all include the child’s favourite colour” explains Dorothy.

The one to ten scale works for decisions and choices too; higher up the scale there are obviously safety issues with no room for negotiation, and toddlers quickly learn this.

And when all else fails, take a deep breath, smile and laugh. “Remember, negativity breeds negativity and positivity breeds positivity” says Dorothy.



TAMING THE TANTRUM

Alexia Santamaria spoke to human behavioural specialist and author Dr John Demartini about toddlers and their tempers.

Toddler temper tantrums are the bane of most parents’ lives. A seemingly smooth morning can turn into an international incident over something as minor as Mum or Dad not letting their little cherub cut the apple himself – with the 25cm chef’s knife. While tantrums are infinitely frustrating for adults, especially in shopping malls and other public places, they are a crucial learning opportunity for our little ones. Let’s face it, we’ve all worked with someone who doesn’t know they can’t always have their way, and we don’t want our kids to grow up to be that hissy-fit-throwing adult.

Dr John Demartini is considered one of the world’s leading authorities on human behaviour and personal development. He has some thoughts on why tantrums happen and how we can minimise the drama they cause.

“Kids throw tantrums for many different reasons. Sometimes they need attention, sometimes they’re tired, sometimes they’re hungry. Sometimes they want to get things done and they can’t get them done as quickly as we do, sometimes they are frustrated that they don’t yet have the language to express how they are feeling – there are so many variables.”

Demartini says there are many things you can do to try and minimise tantrums in the first place. “Try to assist your child to accomplish the things he wants, to lower his general levels of frustration; monitor his rest times so he is equipped to deal with what life throws at him, and give him lots of opportunities to make decisions so he doesn’t feel so powerless. If you really try to find out what his unique needs are and help him to fulfill those in some appropriate way, he is probably less likely to explode.”

Realistically, even if you do all these things, no child will ever be tantrum-free. If your little person does lose his cool in a big way, here’s some things you can do:

- Be understanding – explain that you get what it’s like to be frustrated. Attempt to understand what he is trying to say and how he is feeling.
- Be consistent in your communication – don’t send mixed messages as it will confuse your child and make things worse.
- Be an example of how you’d like your child to behave – children learn much more from what we do than what we say.
- Try not to give in – you need to send the message that throwing a tantrum won’t get your child what he wants.

NEXT ISSUE: In our autumn issue we will continue our **TOD TALKS**, taking a look at some other big toddlerhood issues – milestones, toilet training and welcoming a sibling.

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