



Government of **Western Australia**  
Child and Adolescent Health Service  
WA Country Health Service

# child development **1-2 years**



better health • better care • better value

**Y**ou'll see lots of change between 1 and 2 years.

As a parent, you now have to think about safety and setting limits, as well as caring for your baby.

Your baby is on the move and discovering the world.

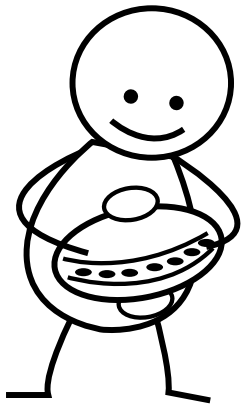
He's 'talking' and making recognisable sounds.

He loves you talking to him, looking at picture books together and pointing to objects he knows.

He's putting sounds together by babbling, trying to copy or say first words, and saying 'No' with a shake of his head.

He may be clingy and wary of strangers, but he is forming special relationships with you and other family members.

His personality is becoming clear to you.



## Social and emotional

Your toddler now understands that he is a completely separate person from you.

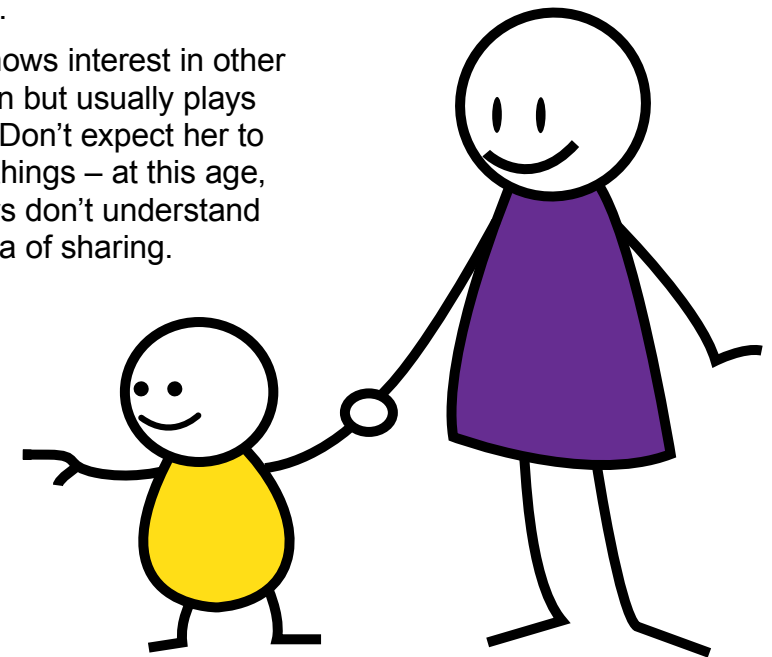
This may mean he worries about the possibility of you leaving him. It also means he'll keep repeating 'me' and 'mine'. Now he knows that he's an independent person, he's starting to understand that he can 'own' things. Having his 'own' way or calling an object 'mine' is a way of coming to grips with this exciting and rather frightening new idea.

It is hard to understand what something is unless you also know what it is not, so your toddler may also be into opposites – probably the opposite of whatever you are suggesting at the time!

Although he probably knows many words, at this age he still can't understand abstract concepts.

He'll often seem to ignore you when you tell him to do something, and needs to be distracted, moved away or picked up. Even though he seems to understand 'no', he still can't control his impulses enough to obey.

- Being the parent of an 18 month old can be hard work, physically and mentally.
- Your toddler will be curious and energetic, but she still needs a lot of adult attention, and for you to be there for reassurance.
- She will depend on you (her parents) and become very attached. She's likely to be afraid of separation because she still doesn't completely understand that you will come back.
- She enjoys playing with an adult and loves repetitive games.
- She shows interest in other children but usually plays alone. Don't expect her to share things – at this age, toddlers don't understand the idea of sharing.
- Your toddler will imitate actions and games, such as talking on a toy telephone.
- She may be more cooperative in dressing because she wants to imitate adults and 'do it myself'.
- However, because she wants to 'get it right', she may become really frustrated if she can't manage to do a task.
- She's slowly getting better at feeding herself, but may become choosy about what she eats.



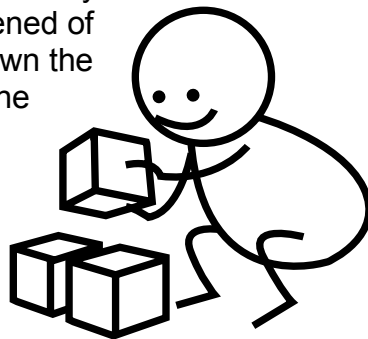
## Developing understanding

In his second year, your toddler still can't see the world in perspective. Concepts of time and distance – too fast, too slow, too far – are all beyond his grasp. This can be frustrating for you because you already understand these concepts.

However, he's working hard at sorting the objects he sees into understandable groups. At first, these groups may be quite loose. For example, after seeing and remembering a duck, he'll say 'duck' when he sees a chicken because they both have feathers and wings. Take the time to enjoy and watch his powers of observation while he's organising the objects, characters and animals he comes across in his world.

- Your toddler's getting better at remembering – he's starting to think before he acts, such as remembering something is hot. He'll also remember and copy past events.

- Between 18 months and 2 years, he'll get better at recognising similarities and differences in things, and he'll start sorting things into groups such as cars, blocks or animals.
- He'll also begin to work out what things belong together – picking out Daddy's shoes, putting crayons with paper.
- He'll begin to try matching and fitting, and can do simple puzzles, such as shapes or familiar animals.
- However, he still has very little understanding of time and can't understand what tomorrow means. He doesn't grasp abstract words such as pretty, empty or heavy, and can't talk about things that he can't see, pick up or touch.
- He also has no real understanding of size and space – he may be frightened of falling down the toilet or the plughole in the bath.



## Physical skills

Your toddler's rapidly increasing movement means you'll probably have to reorganize your house.

She'll go from crawling or teetering within a limited space, to walking confidently and exploring widely, pulling open every handle and turning every knob she can see.

For safety reasons, secure or remove heavy or breakable items.

Leave interesting, unbreakable objects where she can reach them.

Try to limit using negative words like 'no' and 'don't', as it will have a powerful effect on your toddler's view of herself and the world.

You want to paint a positive picture of a world where many things are possible – not a place where nothing is allowed.

When you need to guide her behaviour, try to suggest alternatives and explain the dangers as simply as you can.

### By around 15 months, your toddler can:

- push herself by 'scooting along' on a four-wheeled riding toy
- walk alone with feet wide apart and arms held high to maintain balance
- get to her feet using her hands to push up with.

### By 2 years, your toddler:

- can get up without using her hands
- will probably be able to run without bumping into things and stop when necessary
- can probably go down stairs while holding on, but will put both feet on each step before moving to the next one
- will be interested in, and capable of, turning knobs and pushing buttons

Testing 'how far he can go' is a part of your toddler's physical and social life.

Try to let him explore freely and safely, but don't let him run too far.

**Always let him know that you are there for him to return to.**

## Language

In the second year, language is a mirror of other changes in development.

Your toddler quickly starts to name more of the things in her world and what they are for.

She'll still want you to say what's in her head but too hard for her to express – like 'I want the green cup for my water'.

While the number of words she knows is increasing during this year, she'll get very frustrated because she just can't say as much as she wants to – or because you don't understand what she's saying.

Talk to her a lot and repeat what she has said when you reply. Describe things you see together in simple terms, such as 'Look at the big bus'!

- Your toddler's speech increases from around 5 to 20 words at 18 months to as many as 150 to 300 words by 2 years. They can understand even more words.

- By 2 years, your toddler can tell you most of what she wants with words, like 'outside', 'milk' or 'biscuit', even though she might not always say them properly.
- Her sentences will become longer and more accurate—from 'more' to 'want more' and then 'I want more'.
- Your toddler can also understand more language, and she can remember 2 things at a time, such as 'Get the ball and bring it to Daddy'.
- Besides words to say what she wants, she's beginning to learn words about how she feels, such as 'ow' when she hurts herself.
- By 2, your toddler will have enough language skills to tell people what she wants them to do – 'no' or 'go away'.
- She may hesitate over some words when excited.

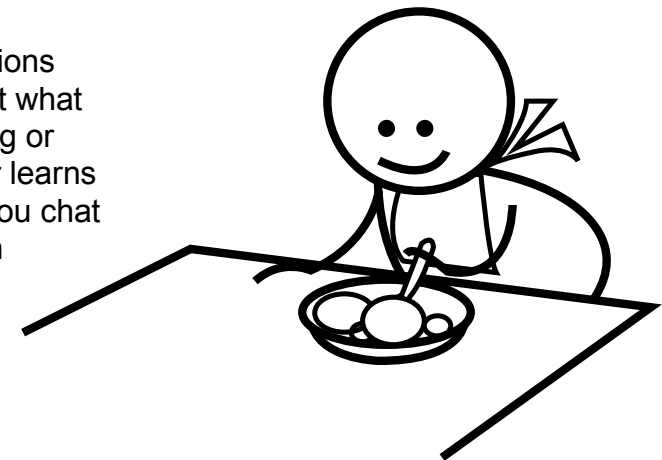
## Activities

- Your toddler will love to turn knobs and push buttons. This helps him learn to use his muscles and to feel that he can manage new things. Protect the TV and other tempting equipment, and give him his own toys with knobs and buttons to press.
- He'll enjoy simple puzzles. (If he loses interest once he can do the puzzle, borrow some from a toy library.)
- He'll like toys that link together, such as trains or stacking toys, hammer and peg sets, and filling and emptying containers.
- Your toddler will love looking at pictures. Name familiar objects and animals with him. Sometimes, let him turn the pages.
- Favourite conversations involve talking about what he's looking at, doing or feeling. Your toddler learns more words when you chat this way, rather than when you ask questions.

Avoid questions that you already know the answer to. Instead of asking 'What's that?', you might say 'Oh, it's a yummy apple'.

- Play games where he can say 'no', such as 'Is Daddy under the bed?'
- Provide different toys so your toddler can learn about different and same, such as fruit, animals or cars.
- He'll love to copy you and play 'house', such as washing up, playing with toy telephones, dressing dolls, and playing dress up.

Don't forget to sometimes just let him play on his own, so that he learns to entertain himself. He will ask for help if he wants it.

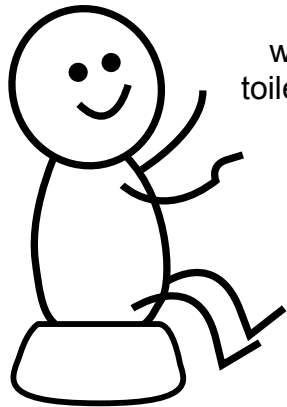


## Toileting

You may want to start 'toilet training' your toddler towards the end of the second year when she may be showing awareness of 'needing to poo'.

Most children will 'train' themselves when they are ready, with some simple encouragement from parents.

This can happen any time between about 2 and 3½ years, but not usually before a toddler turns 2.



If you are worried about toileting, please talk to your child health nurse or doctor.

### SAFETY

Safety is a big issue as toddlers are curious and very mobile, but still too young to understand danger.

- Make sure all dangerous items, including medicines, are locked away up high.
- Secure furniture, including bookshelves and TVs, to a wall.
- Check that the hot water is set to 50 degrees or less.
- **Always supervise children around water.**

## ALERT

**Talk to your doctor or community health nurse if your toddler:**

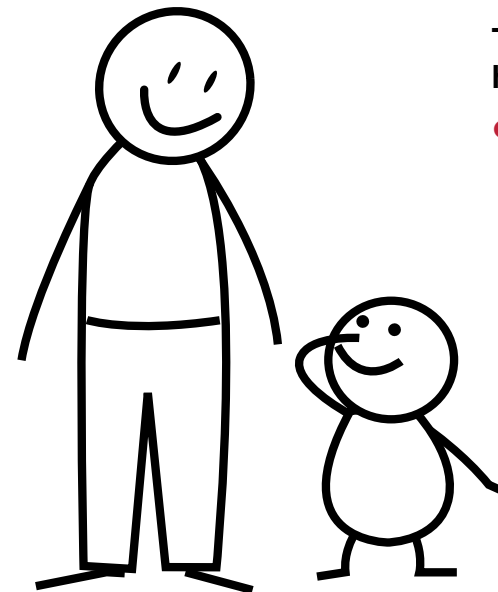
- is tripping over her feet a lot and this is not improving
- can't walk
- can't hold a spoon and get most of the food to her mouth
- can't pick up small objects
- can't build a tower of 3 to 4 bricks
- only regularly uses 20 single words or fewer
- doesn't understand simple directions (this doesn't mean she'll always do as you tell her)
- often runs very far away (out of sight) or climbs extremely high without hesitation.

## Summary

### Social and emotional

**By 18 months your toddler will probably be:**

- exploring the environment around him, touching and pulling whatever he can see and reach (make sure that he's safe)
- enjoying physical contact (cuddles, tickles)
- quickly changing moods and emotions – from happy to sad to angry
- afraid of strangers
- strongly attached to you (parents)
- upset when you leave him, and clingy when you return.



**Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:**

- your toddler doesn't seem to prefer familiar people
- isn't anxious when you leave him.

**By 2 years your toddler will probably be:**

- starting to explore more, opening doors and drawers
- playing near other children, but not yet with other children (unless the other child is older and plays in a way that suits a younger child)
- unable to share
- very fearful of separation
- dependent on a comforter, such as a dummy or blanket.

**Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:**

- your toddler does not act differently around familiar people and strangers.

## Motor skills

### By 18 months your toddler will probably be:

- walking well, but may fall if she tries to run fast
- climbing onto low furniture
- able to push a toy, like a trolley
- able to put one object, like a block, deliberately onto another
- starting to scribble with a pencil
- able to pick up small objects.

### Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:

- your toddler isn't walking.

### By 2 years your toddler will probably be:

- able to run fast, without falling when turning corners or stopping
- squatting steadily to pick up objects from the floor
- able to bring a small chair to the table and sit on the chair at the table
- able to walk backwards pulling a toy or trolley.

### Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:

- your toddler is not walking steadily, especially if she has a limp.

## Speech and language

### By 18 months your toddler will probably be:

- using a range of gestures to communicate (16 gestures by 16 months)
- babbling loudly and often to himself and to others – having a 'conversation'
- listening to people talking to him, and understanding some things, such as 'no'
- able to understand a few simple words and sentences such as 'sit on the chair'
- able to identify a few familiar objects when they are named (such as 'show me the ball' or 'where is the spoon?')
- using at least 5, and up to 20, recognisable words. (The words may be unclear, but you can tell what he means.)

### Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:

- your toddler isn't babbling often
- he's not starting to use some meaningful words
- he doesn't listen when others are talking to him.

### By 2 years your toddler will probably be:

- able to use 150 to 300 recognisable words
- listening to things people say to her
- starting to put 2 words together, such as 'daddy's car'
- joining in with familiar songs
- babbling while playing, with a few recognisable words in the babble.

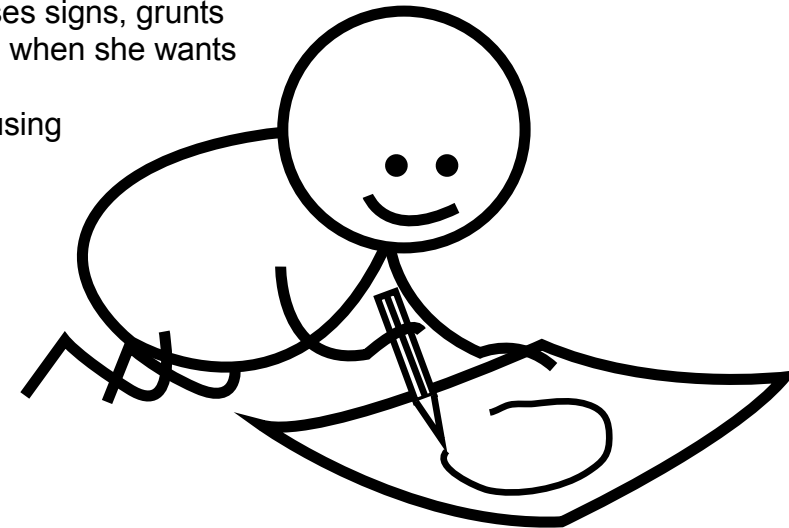
### Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:

- your toddler is mostly silent while playing
- she doesn't respond when people talk to her
- she doesn't point to objects when you name them
- she only uses signs, grunts or gestures when she wants something
- she is not using more than 50 words, and isn't combining 2 or more words together.

## Your child is unique

Every child is different and may develop at different rates. So, if your child does not do some of these things, he may be 'working' on a different area of learning and development. However, children usually follow the same pattern of development, and it's good to feel that your child is developing normally, in their own unique way.

If you are worried about your child's development, or if your child is very different from other children, talk with your doctor or child health nurse. If there is a problem, it's better to get help early.



## For more information contact

- **HealthyWA**  
[www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)
- **Local child health nurse**
- **Local family doctor**
- **Ngala Helpline** (8am–8pm everyday)  
(08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)  
[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)
- **Raising Children Network**  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
- **Kidsafe WA** (8.30am–5pm weekdays)  
(08) 6244 4880 (Outside metro 1800 802 244)  
[www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au)
- **Red Nose**  
[rednose.com.au](http://rednose.com.au)



We've used 'he' and 'she' in turn – please change to suit your child.

**This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.**

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Child and Adolescent Health Service – Community Health  
Reprinted November 2018 CAH-003422

