

# Baby's First Wish

A happy & healthy life

Cooperative Extension Service  
New Mexico State University

Dear  
Parents:

27 & 28 Months

Toddler Years  
Are Busy Years

No one needs to tell you that the toddler years are busy years. They are busy for your toddler who is into everything, and busy for you, because you have to chase, protect, and train her.

With all this activity and stress it may be hard to remember that these first three years are probably the most important time in your child's life. You have the opportunity now to help your child become a responsible, loving, accomplished person.

Try to enjoy these busy, important years. Be good to yourselves. Take time out when you can and share child care with others when you need a break. Enjoy your child's development and celebrate her accomplishments with her. Reward yourselves, too, for your successes, and don't be hard on yourselves for mistakes. All parents make them.

When these busy toddler years pass, believe it or not, you will probably look back on this special time with pleasure and nostalgia. For now, do all you can to make the most of these important years.

## Watch Out Keep Your Child from Choking

Children choke on small things they put in their mouths. Your child will explore his world by putting everything he can grab into his mouth. Here are some ways you can help your child avoid choking:

- Never leave small things in your child's reach even for a moment.
- Do not feed your child hard pieces of food.
- Look for small objects on the floor before you put your child down.
- Do not let your child run with food in his mouth.



**He or She? Him or Her?**  
Baby's First Wish gives equal time and space to both sexes. That's why we take turns referring to children as "he" or "she." Please note: when we use he or she, we include all children.



## Turn Win-Lose into Win-Win

Your toddler's growing independence may be a big source of stress in your life right now. Sometimes, you may feel like you're in a war with your child, trying to win every battle. Some battles end so that you both lose. When you're the one who wins, your child might fight back even harder. When he wins, you might feel angry, defeated, or guilty.

One way to reduce this kind of stress is to handle these battles in a way that lets both of you win at least a little. Maybe you can't talk about compromise with a stubborn 2-year-old, but you can figure out how to end up with no one feeling like a loser. If you refuse to get caught up in a battle, then your

child can't lose and neither can you.

For example: Susie demands that you read her a story and you want her to take a nap. Maybe Susie can pick out the story before nap time, and you can read it when the nap is finished. Maybe you can read half the story before and half after the nap. Or suppose Peter wants to help you frost that special cake, and you want to do it alone.

Maybe you can give Peter a cupcake or a cookie to frost all by himself, while you frost the big cake.

With a little imagination and patience, you can find a way to let you and your child both win. You'll both feel better for it.

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## Nutrition: Food Rewards Can Backfire

"If you behave at the shoe store, I'll buy you a candy bar." "Be a good girl at grandma's house, and you'll get an ice cream cone." It is tempting to use food to try to control your child's behavior, but it can backfire. Soon your child believes that desirable foods are the ones used as rewards or bribes. These foods are almost always high in sugar or fat, or both, like candies, cakes, cookies, chips, and ice cream. As your child gets older, she will have more control over what she eats. If she chooses a lot of these high sugar, high fat foods, then her diet will be poor. This can lead to ill health.

Parents often mean well when they say, "You can't have dessert until you finish all of your vegetables." They think they are doing something good by getting their child to eat the vegetables. But the

message the child hears is very different. She hears: "You have to eat the 'bad' vegetables in order to get the 'good' dessert." You don't want your child to think of any healthy foods as 'bad.' Let her eat what she wants and still have dessert. You can make the dessert something low in fat and sugar like a fruit juice popsicle.

So what is a parent to do? Do not use any food, even nutritious foods, as a bribe or reward. Encourage your child to eat a wide variety of foods, so she will get all the nutrients needed for growth and health. Reward your child with hugs, kisses, and praise. Saying, "You didn't fuss in the shoe store. That made mommy very happy," is a better reward than candy. This reward helps your child feel good about herself.

## Questions Parents Ask:

### Will My Daughter Be Left-Handed?

**Q.** Will my daughter be left-handed? My daughter feeds herself and reaches for toys with her left hand. I don't want her to be left-handed, but I've heard that if I try to keep her from using her left hand, it may cause problems. Should I try to make her use her right hand?

**A.** Most children change handedness several times before settling down to their preference. The key word is preference. Most children settle into a left or right hand preference, but some children continue to have equal skill in both left and right hands throughout their lives.

Don't try to make her use her

right hand. Preference in using hands, feet, and eyes is already present in the child's brain at birth. If you pressure your daughter to change her preference, she may become confused. Forcing her to change might also affect her self-confidence and her learning. If your daughter is really left-handed, she won't be alone. Fifteen percent of the United States population is left-handed.

## School at Home

How would you like to start a school in your home? If you're thinking about books, a chalkboard, and rows of desks, that's not the idea. This school is not only in your home; it is your home, your family, and your day-to-day activities.

You might say, "But I don't know how to teach." You don't need a teaching degree or years of experience. You just need to remember your ABCs:

**A** child's first and most important teachers are his parents.

**B**e alert to the new situations your child faces each day.

**C**onduct short, simple lessons many times during the day.

Now, here is how to conduct your school. Keep learning fun! Teach by playing games and talking to your child in a friendly way.

- Teach colors: As you set the table, talk about the red dishes, the blue tablecloth. As you sort the clothes, talk about the blue jeans, the white shirt. Talk about shapes of toys or furnishings in your home—the round mirror, the square table.



- Teach about similarities and differences by helping your child sort spoons and forks in the drawer.
- Teach about language and books by showing pictures and reading short stories to your child again, again, and again. Talk with him about the story.

Remember, your child's first school is in your home. The lessons you teach will prepare him to learn even more when he starts preschool and kindergarten. Children who have been taught at home enjoy learning and usually learn faster when they start school.

For more information on tantrums, call your county Extension office and ask for the publication, "Temper Tantrums."

## What We Know

### Make-Believe Play

Imagination is a wonderful thing, and we can help our children develop it. Children love to pretend they are someone who is important and powerful, like Superman, a doctor, a teacher, a parent. This

is a good, healthy part of growing up. It helps children practice for the future. It gives them pleasure and comfort. Imaginary friends can give a special kind of companionship. Studies show that well-developed young children often pretend they were someone else—usually an adult. Most of these children had received a good deal of encouragement from their parents to engage in fantasy play.

Join your child in fantasy play. You will make this important play even more special for your toddler and will be encouraging her creativity.

Remember, *Baby's First Wish* describes a typical child at each age. Each child is special and each child develops at his or her own pace. Perfectly normal children may do things earlier or later than those described in *Baby's First Wish*. If you are concerned about your child's development, see your doctor.

# Games for Growing



## Sorting Game

### Purpose of the Game

To help your child learn about how things can be alike or different.

### How to Play

Find three or four each of about four different things, like four playing cards, four ribbons, four pebbles, four leaves. Mix these up and put them in a pile or a bowl. Ask your child to sort them into piles of things that are just alike. If your child wants, you can take a turn at sorting too. To make the game harder, you can make all the things almost alike, such as four small paper squares, four medium-sized paper squares, and four large paper squares.

Remember, play this and any game only as long as it's fun for your child and for you.

## Pretend You Are

### Purpose of the Game

To help your child use his body and his imagination.

### How to Play

Ask your child to imitate familiar things like a flower, a tree, a train, a dog, a boat, or daddy driving a car. Take turns being the flower, the tree, and so on.

## First Numbers

### Purpose of the Game

To help your child learn the difference between one and two.

### How to Play

Play a special game with your child, showing her groups of things that have one, two, or many in them. You can use small toys, books, paper cups, flowers, bottle tops, or other small safe things for this game. Encourage her to pick out the group that is one. Put two objects together and ask her how many. Put one object out and ask her how many. Let her have a turn to ask you how many. Remember, play the game only as long as it is fun for both of you.



## Homemade Toys

## That Teach

## A Prop for Pretend Play

Isn't it nice to see your child's imagination develop? When your toddler pretends he can be as powerful, as big, and as important as he wants to be, this is a good feeling. He can practice being like members of his family or kings, teachers, or police officers.

Imagination and pretend play are important. They help your child cope with his world and prepare for his future. They help him develop his creativity, and they are just plain fun. You can encourage his imagination and be a part of his pretend play by making a cartoon play place with him.



For the carton play place you will need:

- Large cardboard carton that you might get from grocery or appliance stores. Your carton should be large enough for your toddler to crawl inside.
- Crayons, colored paper or streamers, balloons, and so forth for decorating the play place.

The play place can be whatever your toddler wants it to be—a house, a spaceship, a boat, a cave, a fort, or all of these. Place the box so the open end is on the floor. Cut windows, portholes, or whatever your toddler wants on the sides and back of the box. Let your toddler decorate the play place however he wants. He may want you to write his name on the box or put a message or sign on it.

# Health



## Anemia

If your child seems pale and unusually tired, ask your doctor about anemia. Anemia is the most common sign of nutritional deficiency in children. Anemia can be a signal of disease or of a diet lacking in iron. Some forms of anemia are very serious. They signal a problem with red cell production or serious loss of blood. When you take your child to the doctor, ask about a test for hemoglobin or hematocrit, to check your child for anemia.

# Guidance and Discipline

## Discipline With “Time Out”

When you use it the right way, “time out” can be a good way to handle those times when your toddler seems determined to disobey and nothing you do will stop her. Time out means putting your toddler in a safe place away from you for a few minutes. This gives you a chance to calm down, if you need it and lets your toddler know you are not going to let her continue her disobedient or naughty behavior. Time out should be used so that it does not make your toddler feel you don’t love her or that you want to hurt her.

Here are some important things to do to keep time out as a guidance and discipline method, not punishment: Tell your child about time out.

- Tell your child ahead of time, before a rule is broken, what

time out is and how you will use it.

- Choose the time out place carefully. Use a safe, nonscary place like a room, a chair, a playpen, or part of a room. Never use a closet or place that is dangerous or frightening to your child.
- Let your toddler know why you are using time out and how long it will last. Explain to your toddler before time out why she is being disciplined. Tell her how long time out will be and tell her you will come to get her when the time is up. Keep your promise.
- Keep time out short. For a toddler, time out should last no more than 3 minutes, or 1 minute for each year of your child’s life. Set a timer and be sure you follow your time limits. When the time is up, go in to



her, give her a hug, and invite her to be with you.

- Try to stay calm. When you use time out or any kind of discipline, try to keep calm. Explain clearly to your child why you are limiting her. Follow through in a way that is firm, but also shows that you love and care for her.

# Preparing Your Toddler for Special Occasions

Parents are often eager to have their children join in the fun of celebrations. For the young child, these festive occasions may be happy or they may be scary and upsetting.

Your young child may not want to talk to a strange Santa Claus or shake hands with a 5-foot Easter bunny. She may not laugh when she is swooped down upon by a neighborhood child in a witch costume. She might not enjoy meeting new relatives at a family gathering. You can't protect your child from every frightening situation, but here are a few things you can do to prepare her.

- Talk to your child about where you are planning to go. Tell her what she will see and do there.
- Practice ahead of time, if possible. Show your toddler pictures of Santa before visiting him. Let her play with masks in preparation for Halloween. Before the family party, show her photographs and tell her about the relatives she may see.
- Before rushing into a gathering, observe the situation with your child from a safe distance. Let her watch other children meeting Santa or the Easter bunny, and give her reassurance by hugs and words. Don't force your little one to get close to unfamiliar or scary people or characters. Let her take her time getting acquainted and don't pressure her to participate.



## Choosing Books for Toddlers

When you select books for toddlers, consider these suggestions:

- The subject should be familiar to your child. It should involve things the child knows about in his world.
- The plot should be simple or nonexistent. Some books have only pictures and labels on them. These can be fun for toddlers. Your child will enjoy turning the pages with you, seeing the pictures, and talking to you about them.
- The words in the book should be simple and clear, and there should be just a few words on each page. Toddlers enjoy books in which the words are fun to say and are repeated.
- The pictures should be large, clear, and brightly colored. Toddlers often like drawings better than photographs because they are easier to understand.
- See if you can find sturdy cardboard books. These can be purchased inexpensively or borrowed from your library. Your child can turn the pages of these books more easily and the pages will not tear.



# Toddlers Show Their Feelings

Toddlers naturally show you and tell you that they love you. Welcome and enjoy these feelings. You'll want to show your affection toward your toddler too, with words and hugs.

But toddlers also, just as naturally, sometimes say and show that they dislike you. Parents understandably find these angry words and actions hard to accept. It is much nicer to hear "I love you" than "I hate you," but both kinds of feelings are common with toddlers. These expressions of negative feelings are part of growing up.

Try to handle these actions and feelings with understanding instead of argument or punishment. These words and actions don't mean you have been a bad parent or that your toddler truly dislikes you. Understand that your toddler's anger is temporary and normal.

Show your child that you care for him even when he is angry, and that angry feelings are OK. Firmly prevent him from turning his feelings into angry actions, such as biting, kicking, and hitting. Do not give in to his unreasonable demands just to prevent angry outbursts. You might try to talk to him and find out more about why he is feeling angry.

Be patient; the good and loving relationship you have with your toddler will keep these angry times short.



## Be Good to Yourself: When There's Never Enough Time

Stress can be caused by a feeling that you have too much to do and not enough time. You can't even get all the necessary chores done, much less play with your child or take time for yourself. Managing your time better can help prevent this kind of stress.

Here are some ideas:

- Make a list of everything you want to get done for one day or one week. Decide which things are most important, and which ones can wait, or don't have to be done at all. Be reasonable about the number of things you can do in the time you have.

- Write out a schedule for your day, so you can aim for a time to finish each task. Think about how you'll do the task in the time you've planned.
- Group chores together if they need similar tools. Group all the chores that require going out, or the ones that require someone else to care for your child.
- Figure out how much you really can do in the time you have. Make sure you build in time for the most important people in your life—your child and yourself.

### Coming Next:

- Good Times at Mealtimes
- Avoid Overusing "No"

NMSU COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE OFFICES

# Baby's First Wish

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Another 4-H Prevention Program

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