



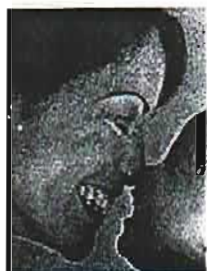
TALKING TO TODDLERS

COMMUNICATING WITH A 1-YEAR-OLD CAN BE TRICKY. HERE, THE BEST WAYS TO GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS. **By Sarah McCraw Crow**

At age 1, your toddler experiences a constant stream of discoveries and surprises—sometimes happy, sometimes a bit unpleasant. She doesn't yet have the vocabulary to talk about all those brand-new events and feelings—but luckily, you do. If you choose your words wisely, you can foster clearer communication between the two of you, help her handle challenges, and even get her to behave better. Finding exactly the right thing to say can be tricky, though. To help out, here are some examples of effective phrases you can use when talking to your 1-year-old.

1 "YOU REALLY FEEL FRUSTRATED RIGHT NOW!"

When you realize that your toddler is about to spiral into a tantrum, you can often get her to stay calm and listen just by kneeling down, looking into her eyes, and labeling her feelings for her. When you say, "That made you so angry!" you'll help her understand that it's normal to experience strong and sometimes scary emotions. Your words help her process the feelings she's having, and when she's a little older, she'll be able to say "I'm mad!" or "I'm so happy!" all by herself.



WHAT NOT TO SAY

When it comes to toddlers, some things are better left unsaid.

Wrong: "Stop acting like such a baby!"

Why: He still is a baby—and his behavior is most likely age-appropriate.

Wrong: "Do what I say, and we'll get ice cream later."

Why: Bribery may bring short-term results, but long-term trouble.

Wrong: "Hurry up!"

Why: Those little legs and minds can only move so quickly.

Wrong: "You are a very naughty girl!"

Why: Label animals, foods, colors—but not your child.

2 "STOP! THAT'S HOT!"

To make a point about safety, keep it short and simple, using only three or four words. Parents too often overexplain, and the meaning—"Stay away from the stove," "Keep out of the street"—can get lost in all those words, says Lise Eliot, Ph.D., author of *What's Going On in There?: How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life*. It's fine to use a firm "No!" to get your child's attention if he's in danger or hurting someone. But if he constantly hears "no," he'll begin to tune it out. If that's the case, babyproof your home so he can explore without encountering a steady stream of reprimands.

3 "IT'S TIME FOR YOUR BATH."

Many parents make the mistake of asking ("Would you like to take a bath now?"), but it's better to use a statement when you want your child to make a transition like taking a bath or preparing for bed. Why? You know that you need to stick to the routine, so inquiring about what she'd like to do merely creates an opening for conflict. The rule you should follow in this case: Don't ask, just tell.

4 "FIRST WE'LL PUT YOUR BLOCKS AWAY, AND THEN WE'LL GET DRESSED."

Your toddler has only the foggiest notions about time, so "we're leaving for Grandma's in 15 minutes" doesn't mean much to her, says Roberta Golinkoff, Ph.D., author of *Einstein Never Used Flashcards*. Instead of giving a time frame, describe a sequence of events: Explain what will happen first ("We'll clean up") and

what will happen next ("Then we'll get dressed so we're all ready to go out").

5 "SHOULD YOUR SOCKS GO ON FIRST, OR YOUR PANTS?"

Let your child make simple choices as part of his daily routine. When you hand over just a little bit of control, you boost your toddler's confidence in his own abilities. But a choice between two items is plenty, Dr. Eliot says. "The youngest kids have a limited attention span and memory, and they simply can't keep track of many things for very long."

6 "YOU'RE THROWING FOOD, NOT EATING IT. ALL DONE!"

To manage your toddler's behavior at the table, act quickly and use the same short phrase each time, says Ken Haller, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at Saint Louis University School of Medicine, in St. Louis. If your child is throwing food, for instance, a simple statement like "You're playing with your dinner. All done!" is enough. Keep a calm tone of voice, and remove her from the table.

7 "I LIKE THE WAY YOU HELD MY HAND WHILE WE WERE IN THAT BUSY STORE."

Positive reinforcement—pointing out what your child is doing right—is a strong motivator, even for the youngest children, Dr. Haller says. "Even if they don't quite understand, kids pick up the cadence and the rhythms of what you're saying, and they catch some of your meaning."

8 "LET'S NAME THE ANIMALS IN YOUR BOOK."

You're probably already teaching your toddler simple labeling words like the names of body parts and colors—but finding even more subjects to talk about will help him make new language connections. Point out different objects in his favorite book each time you read it; as you take a walk, use descriptive language ("Look at the red leaves on that tall tree!") to help him see the world in new ways. □