

Why Toddlers Love Saying 'No';



Highlights

As your child grows, they will learn new words and become more independent. At around 2 years old, your child will learn to say 'no'.

Your child may say 'no' and refuse to do things as a way to make their own choices.

They might say 'no' to try and express difficult feelings that they don't understand.

You can help manage this difficult behaviour by supporting them and giving them choices.

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Understanding Toddler Refusal

Between the ages of 1 and 3 years, toddlers start to become very independent.

They discover that they can make things happen and they can do things for themselves.

They will also start to learn new words, like:

'no'

'I want'

'go away'

Sometimes toddlers refuse to:

Do anything you ask

Eat certain foods

Wear certain clothes

As a parent, this can be difficult and tiring. It's important to remember that your toddler is not refusing things to deliberately upset you. At this age, toddlers can only think about themselves. They may not be aware of what you are feeling.

Why Toddlers Say 'No'

Saying 'no' and refusing to do things is a normal part of toddler development.

Your child should be saying 'no' by the time they are 2 years old.

Saying 'no' and making their own choices is important for toddlers. It means they are:

Starting to grow as a person separately from you

Learning what they like and don't like

Trying to have some control of their own life

Difficult toddler behaviour can also be a sign of feelings and thoughts that are hard for your child to understand. These feelings might include:

Over-excitement

Anger or frustration

Disappointment

Your toddler may not know enough words to tell you how they are feeling. This can lead to tantrums. Saying 'no' is one way for them to express how they're feeling.

Managing Difficult Behaviour

There are some tips and tricks you can try to manage difficult behaviour.

Help your child feel comfortable

It's easier to change your child's environment than change how they are reacting. If your toddler is saying 'no' a lot, you can:

- Look at ways to distract them
- Show them they are special and loved
- Help them feel heard and understood
- Attend to their needs
- Make sure their environment is safe

Offer choices

Offering choices helps your child feel in charge, while also making sure they don't feel overwhelmed. Choices should not be yes or no questions. Give them a choice between 2 things you agree with, such as:

- Do you want to put away your blocks or your stuffed toys?
- Do you want to wear your red coat or your green coat?

This will give your toddler the feeling of being in charge.

Teach your toddler a different response

Often toddlers say 'no' so often it becomes automatic. They might not be able to think of another word. Start to expand your toddler's vocabulary.

For example, you can ask your child, "What's a nicer way to say no?" You can

suggest they instead say "No, thank you."

Don't say 'no' so often yourself

If you say 'no' all the time, your toddler will copy your behaviour.

Instead of saying 'no' or telling them what they shouldn't be doing, tell your child what they should be doing. For example:

If they are splashing water out of the bath, you can say, "We play with water in the bath, not on the floor."

If they are raising their voice in the house, say, "Use a nice quiet voice inside" instead of "Don't shout."

When asking your child to do something:

Use a calm voice

Get down to their level

Look them in the eye

Firmly tell them what you would like them to do

Reward good behaviour

Try to distract your toddler from a difficult situation. If they do as they are told, praise them. You can reward them with:

A kiss and a hug

A sticker

A small toy

Extra playtime

Do not reward bad behaviour.

Don't give up

Sometimes your toddler needs to do what they are told - for example, if they're in the middle of the road and refusing to move.

It's OK for your toddler to know you are in charge. Be firm, but gentle.

Tools And Assistance

If you need support with your toddler's behaviour, you can speak to your child health nurse or your doctor.