

Parents.

HOME — Toddlers & Preschoolers — Development — Intellectual Development

Toddlers: An Intellectual Timeline

Though not as dramatic as her first steps, these advances show how fast your child is developing.

By **Heather Gowen Walsh**



Getty Images

You already know that she's the cutest person in the room, but did you also know that she's the fastest learner? Your toddler's motor, language, and cognitive abilities are all in hyperdrive. "Kids advance more at this age than at any other time," says *Parents* advisor Jenn Berman, Psy.D., author of *Superbaby: 12 Ways to Give Your*

Child a Head Start in the First 3 Years. "Each action your child masters is a significant breakthrough." Prepare to be amazed by these milestones, and learn how to take them to the next level.

Parents

When it happens 16 to 24 months

Why you should be impressed A toddler's ability to balance one object on top of another shows that his body and brain are working in tandem. It takes hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills to manipulate the blocks correctly, along with an understanding of cause and effect ("Once I stack the blocks, I can knock them down").

What you can do Set aside an area where your child can practice building, suggests Dr. Berman. Also stock your house with shape sorters, nesting cups, and wooden peg puzzles, which help develop many of the same skills.

- [Get daily parenting tips with the Parents e-newsletter.](#)

Putting Words Together

When it happens 18 to 24 months

Why you should be impressed Your toddler has likely been saying words for several months, but the first time she strings two of them together is reason to cheer. "When your child says, 'More apple' or 'Throw ball,' she's not merely sharing what she wants. She's actually engaging you in conversation," explains Diane Paul, Ph.D.,

director of clinical issues in speech-language pathology for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

Parents

~~MOMMY SHIRT, respond, yes, this is MOMMY'S SHIRT. It's red and has a stain on it, doesn't it?"~~

"Reading" to Himself

When it happens 18 to 24 months

Why you should be impressed Your child isn't really reading, of course, but turning the pages, pointing at pictures, and repeating words he remembers from when you read it together are still noteworthy achievements. "He is imitating a behavior you've taught him and using his emerging language skills and memory to tell the story," says Claire McCarthy, M.D., a pediatrician at Boston Children's Hospital.

What you can do Reread your child's favorite books often. Promote his literacy skills by pointing to words as you read them, making sound effects to enhance his interest in the tale, and asking questions about what you've read (even if he can't answer them).

ADVERTISING

Parents

Using Utensils

When it happens 18 to 24 months

Why you should be impressed Although it will likely result in major dinnertime messes, your toddler's attempts at using a fork and spoon help her develop an important self-help skill that boosts her coordination and fosters independence. "She grasps the significance of mealtime as well and wants to imitate what the big people at the table do," explains Dr. McCarthy.

What you can do Give your child a spoon and fork at every meal (even if she prefers eating with her fingers). You can also help boost dexterity by having her try to put on her shoes and unbutton her coat by herself.

Scribbling

When it happens 20 to 30 months

Why you should be impressed At first, simply grasping a crayon and making a mark is challenging for a toddler. Once he's got that down, he'll start to make dots and squiggles. Soon your child will actively choose colors and attempt to make shapes. "Over time, he'll draw what he's thinking about, which takes imagination and planning," says Dr. McCarthy.

What you can do Instead of letting him play alone with Play-Doh or crayons, join in the fun. "Ask him, 'What are you making? May I color with you?'" suggests Dr. McCarthy.

Parents

Following Two-Part Directions

When it happens 24 to 35 months

Why you should be impressed Get the spoon and put it on the table. That may seem easy-peasy to you but not to your 2-year-old. "She has to grasp what you say and be able to hold the two thoughts together," explains Dr. Paul. Completing such a task means that her listening skills and memory have advanced by leaps and bounds.

What you can do Before spouting commands, make sure you have your child's attention. Also use simple language, and help your child learn the difference between prepositional words such as in, on, over, under, and through ("This cup is on the table; this carpet is under the table"). Speak with your doctor or a speech-language pathologist if your child is still struggling with two-step directions by his third birthday.

