

Learning About Your Toddler

Attachment

What is attachment?

The close relationship between you and your child that gives them a safe place from which to explore the world.

A healthy attachment is one of the key factors in raising a happy and confident child.

When your child is attached well, they feel secure. They can try new things, knowing they can always return to their safe place with you.

Attachment grows over time through day-to-day actions and routines. When you respond to your toddler in a loving and accepting way time after time, they learn that they can rely on you to support and protect them.



KEY TAKEAWAY

A healthy attachment is key to raising a child who's happy and confident. Attachment grows over time through consistent, responsive and loving interactions between you and your toddler.

Building a strong attachment with your child means:

- **Providing comfort every time they're sick, hurt, scared or upset** by reassuring, rocking or holding them.
- **Paying attention and responding to them.** Show your child that they're important to you by spending one-on-one time with them and doing things that interest them. Put aside screens and other distractions to focus on being with them. See [Brain Development](#) to learn more about "serve and return" interactions.



TRY THIS

Find activities that you and your toddler both enjoy. Spend time talking, listening to them and taking them places. Read stories, go for outings and play games together.

- **Following daily routines** so they know what to expect. Try to keep mealtimes and bedtime predictable and make rules that are clear and consistent.
- **Showing them trust** by letting them explore while you supervise. Let them go off a short way when they're learning to crawl or walk, for example, but stay nearby so they can return to you.

- **Talking with them about events that may upset them.** Things like the birth of a new sibling or a friend moving away can cause nightmares and other distress. Even very negative experiences can be made easier by the presence of a positive and caring adult.
- **Preparing them for any time you're apart.** Only leave your child in the care of someone you trust. Then set up a goodbye ritual (a kiss, some special words and a wave from the driveway, for instance) and leave with confidence. Provide them with things to do, a photo of you and a favourite blanket or toy for comfort. Let them know when you'll return, and do your best to come back on time.
- **Building good memories** by telling them family stories, looking at photo albums together, keeping a collection of their crafts and artwork, writing a diary of their achievements and making videos of their special events.
- **Creating a sense of belonging** by honouring family and cultural traditions.

Temperament

What is temperament?

Your child's unique character that makes them "who they are."

Your child's temperament may be obvious right from birth or show up over time.

Temperament includes:

- a child's general mood
- how active they are
- how they react to new situations
- whether they're easily distracted or can focus well

Your toddler's temperament may be similar to yours or very different. Home environment and the people around your child will have some effect, but your child's temperament is mostly just a natural part of who they are.



DID YOU KNOW?

Accepting your child's temperament doesn't mean letting them do whatever they want. It means helping them develop in a way that's comfortable for them.



FAMILY STORY

A nurse suggested I get down on the floor with my son and watch what he was doing while trying to imagine what he was thinking. I learned a lot about him from this simple act of quiet watching.



Support your child's temperament by:

- **Understanding them.** By watching your child in a variety of settings, you'll learn a lot about them, including their likes and dislikes and how they feel most comfortable relating with others.
- **Not labelling them.** A child who grows up hearing that they're shy or that they talk too much, for example, will tend to believe it and live up to those expectations.
- **Being open and accepting who they are,** rather than expecting them to be a certain way. Let your child take the lead in uncovering their talents and preferences.



BRAIN BUILDER

Instead of scolding your toddler, help them understand what's happening and show empathy toward their feelings. Rather than "Stop throwing your toys and calm down!" try "It seems like you're really upset. I'm sorry you feel that way. I get upset sometimes, too."

As your child grows, help them put words to how they're feeling and to handle big emotions in a healthy way: "Can you tell me what you're feeling? Is there a way you could tell me you're angry without throwing your toys?"



- **Finding ways to direct their temperament into positive activities** that feel comfortable for them.
- **If they're shy** in a playgroup, for example, try letting them sit with you and watching until they're ready to join in.
- **If they're full of energy,** try giving them ways to move around – like dancing, running in the yard or helping with chores. If they have to sit still, give them something to hold that they can play with.



DID YOU KNOW?

When your child behaves a certain way, they're communicating something to you. What might look like being "naughty" is really just your toddler's way of telling you they need something. See [Dealing With Common Challenging Behaviours](#) for tips on how to respond.



DID YOU KNOW?

Learning to accept and work with your child's temperament rather than trying to change it will help them feel good about themselves. And it will make both your lives happier and easier.

