

Helping Your Toddler Through Change

Toddlers like routine. So when change happens, it can be hard on them.

Signs Your Toddler is Upset

Your toddler may not be able to tell you in words how they're feeling. Instead, they may:

- not want to eat
- cry
- have nightmares or problems sleeping
- have temper tantrums
- be clingy
- be very quiet
- go back to old habits like sucking their thumb



KEY TAKEAWAY

When change happens, tell your toddler that they're loved, that they'll always be taken care of and that the change isn't their fault. With positive support, children are resilient.

Dealing With Planned Changes

With some changes – like a new baby or moving house – you can prepare your toddler in advance. Try:

- ✓ using positive words to talk about the upcoming change
- ✓ listening to their worries
- ✓ answering their questions simply and honestly
- ✓ telling them everything will be okay
- ✓ reading them books on the subject
- ✓ giving them toys that let them act out the change – a toy truck if you're moving, for example
- ✓ not taking on more than one big change at a time
- ✓ making extra time to connect, and giving lots of love and attention
- ✓ making time for their usual routines and favourite activities



DID YOU KNOW?

When faced with big changes, it's normal for toddlers to temporarily return to old habits (like using diapers) or challenging behaviours (like throwing tantrums). Be patient and provide extra love and support.

A new baby

While a new baby brings joy and excitement, it also changes routines and takes time and attention away from your toddler. So it's normal for them to be upset.

Help your toddler prepare by:

- ✓ letting them feel the baby kick
- ✓ reading them books about babies and big siblings
- ✓ showing your toddler their own baby pictures and talking about what they were like as a baby
- ✓ giving them a baby doll to care for
- ✓ making any big changes – like toilet learning – as early as possible before the birth, or waiting until after the birth, when your toddler has had time to adjust
- ✓ talking to them about what babies do or visiting friends with babies, so they know what to expect
- ✓ planning for their care during the birth. If you want them to be at the birth, arrange for someone other than your partner(s) to take care of them. And tell them about the medical equipment they might see.



TRY THIS

Try not to pressure your child to be in love with the new baby. A positive bond between siblings takes time and space.

On the day of the birth, try:

- ✓ keeping your toddler's day as normal as possible
- ✓ having them visit the baby when no other visitors are there
- ✓ letting them hold and talk to the baby
- ✓ talking about how much the baby looks like them or how much the baby seems to like them

At home after the birth, try:

- ✓ keeping up your previous routines
- ✓ making time to do the special things you used to do together
- ✓ being extra patient with your toddler, even if they return to old habits
- ✓ including them in your time with the baby, like having them sit with you while you breastfeed or chestfeed
- ✓ taking a photo of them each time you take one of the baby
- ✓ not using the baby as a reason for not doing something. Instead of "I can't play with you because I have to feed the baby," for instance, try, "When I've finished feeding the baby, let's play!"

As your children grow, try:

- ✓ valuing their differences, instead of comparing them
- ✓ encouraging them to play together and also giving them time apart
- ✓ letting each one know they're special
- ✓ not giving them labels like "the baby"
- ✓ setting clear rules for how they treat each other



BE AWARE

If you're feeling guilty about the changes the new baby brings (or simply exhausted by the added responsibilities), you may be tempted to loosen your rules or buy extra gifts for your toddler. But this can make them think that you don't think they can handle the change, or lead them to be more demanding.



Dealing With Loss and Grief

Death

Your toddler doesn't understand that some things are final, so they may have little or no reaction to someone's death. Or they may cry, be angry, or worry that someone else will die.

Before facing a loss, prepare your toddler by:

- ✓ teaching them that death is a part of life by talking about things like the changing of the seasons
- ✓ answering questions truthfully without creating new fears. If they ask, "Will you and I die?" you can say, "Yes, we all die, but Mommy won't die for a very long time and neither will you."

When a loved one or a pet dies, try:

- ✓ using simple words
- ✓ giving details only if they ask
- ✓ talking about your cultural and religious beliefs about death
- ✓ letting them express their feelings
- ✓ showing them that grief is normal and will change over time
- ✓ keeping daily routines so they feel secure
- ✓ giving them extra love and attention
- ✓ talking about the person or pet, looking at photos or drawing pictures



DID YOU KNOW?

Your toddler is very tuned in to your feelings. Even if you don't tell them about a serious loss, they'll sense that something is different. And not telling them may make them more afraid.



TRY THIS

When a loved one dies, don't say they've "gone to sleep" or "gone away" or your toddler may get scared of sleeping or travelling.



FAMILY STORY

When my brother died unexpectedly, I gently explained to our 2-year-old that his uncle had died and wouldn't be back again. He just said "OK" and that was it. A few weeks later, though, he asked when my brother was coming to visit. He didn't understand that it was final.

Finding emotional support

When you're going through difficult times, it's okay for your child to see that you're upset. Tell them what they need to know in a way that they can understand. But remember that your child is not the right person to go to for emotional support or to discuss grown-up problems. Find another adult – a friend, health care provider or counsellor – to talk to.

Family breakup

If your family breaks up, your toddler needs to feel safe and secure.

Help your toddler by:

- ✓ being calm and patient, despite your feelings
- ✓ giving them lots of love and attention, and telling them you won't leave them
- ✓ keeping to your usual routines and rules
- ✓ letting them ask questions, even if they ask the same ones over and over
- ✓ giving direct and simple answers
- ✓ telling them it's not their fault
- ✓ letting them talk happily about their other parent or caregiver, and not speaking negatively about the other parent or caregiver to your child
- ✓ making sure any new home they'll be spending time at is comfortable and welcoming

See Family Resources in the [Resources](#) section for more information.



TRY THIS

After a separation, think of yourself and your ex-partner(s) or caregiver(s) as co-workers with the shared job of caring for your toddler. If you're not ready to talk to each other calmly, use email or texts, or write information in a book that you send back and forth. And ask a friend or relative to help with pickup and drop-off.