



Let's Grow

Issue #9: 2.5 - 3 Years

By two and a half years of age, your child's distinct personality is emerging! Your toddler loves to please others and is thrilled when you praise them. Children learn behaviour with encouraging comments such as "I really liked the way you let them play with your new ball". Be specific with your praise. Take advantage of teachable moments and offer positive reinforcement.

Play allows toddlers to learn about their world. Play helps develop motor skills (running, jumping, balance), learn language, discipline (e.g. taking turns), and expands their creativity. Play helps to improve problem-solving skills, encourage concentration, and develop their natural curiosity about their environment. Toddlers learn best through hands-on exploration. Taking things apart, pushing things in and pulling things out, filling containers and emptying containers, are all fascinating to a toddler.

Your 2-½ - 3-year-old can become totally absorbed in their play. Give your toddler some warning before you announce that playtime is over or that something needs to change. Use concrete measurements they will understand—remember 'five more minutes' means nothing to a toddler. Try something like, "You can fill three more containers, and then we must tidy up and go". This gives them time to change their focus, prepare for the end of an activity and reinforces the concept of time. Ending activities will become much easier, as they see how consistent and predictable you are when guiding them.



Caring For Your Child

Sleep

Sleep patterns vary from family to family and with each child. Sleep issues are resolved easily and early for some; however, there are other children who at 2-½ years are still waking up in the night. The most important thing to remember is both you and your child need enough sleep in order to function well. By age 2-½ to 3 years your toddler will most likely be sleeping 10 to 13 hours in a 24-hour period and this may or may not include a short nap in the day.

Sleep problems in toddlers are common. We can help change our toddler's sleep pattern with a few simple and consistent routines.

1. Start with a peaceful bedtime routine, a bath, possibly a nutritious snack, brushing teeth and a book or two. Avoid using screens for at least 1 hour before bedtime and keep all screens out of your child's bedroom.
2. Have other children lower their noise level.
3. Allow your toddler a little time to talk about their day. Make sure the discussion ends with positive feelings.
4. If they have a favourite stuffed animal, make sure it is in the bed.
5. Read a book or tell a story.
6. Have a cuddle time.
7. If the child is afraid of the dark, have a nightlight or leave the door slightly open.
8. Say goodnight and leave the room.

For information about healthy sleep for your baby and child visit:

http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy_sleep_for_your_baby_and_child



Vision

Early eye examinations are important for children! As many as 10% of preschool children have a vision problem serious enough to affect their eye health if left untreated. Eye exams are covered by OHIP annually until children are 19. If your family is eligible for the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works, they support the cost of glasses, if they are needed. Children in Junior and Senior Kindergarten are also eligible for free glasses through the Eye See... Eye Learn program. Now is a good time to have them checked! For more information talk to your optometrist or call 211.



Safety

No helmet, no riding!

Safety is #1 and your toddler's growing brain needs to be protected! Ensure your child has a proper fitting helmet. Just like everything else you do, your toddler is watching, so make sure you wear your helmet too before getting on your bicycle. The safest place for your toddler to learn to ride their bicycle or practice is away from traffic and supervised. Once your child gets better at riding their bicycle, creating clear and consistent rules as to where they can go (like the end of the driveway, or to the stop sign) will be important.

For more bike safety tips: <https://www.parachutecanada.org/en/injury-topic/cycling/>

For more information about helmets, visit: [Helmets for bicycles, inline skating, scooter riding and skateboarding – Parachute](https://www.parachutecanada.org/en/injury-topic/helmets/)

Feeding & Nutrition

Are some foods good and others bad?

At this age, you may be hearing the question ‘why’ often. At some point your child will probably ask why they are being served certain foods and not others. Taking a ‘food neutral’ approach is important to help your child develop a healthy relationship with food. We want our children to love a variety of foods, to listen to their bodies, to not meltdown over certain foods, and to not feel guilt or shame for eating. When we label some foods as good or healthy and others as bad, unhealthy, junk, treats or sometimes foods we are sending unhelpful messages to our children. What children hear is that some foods make them a better person and that we have to eat them – making them into a chore rather than something to enjoy. On the other hand, people who eat or want to eat ‘bad’ foods must be ‘bad people’, leading kids to feel guilty or ashamed. After all we are what we eat, right? This can later lead to sneaking foods, emotional eating, or disordered eating.

Of course, different foods contain different nutrients, and we want our kids to get all the nutrients they need to grow well. So how can parents help?

1. Remember, what, when and where food is served is a parent’s role in the feeding relationship with children. Offer the foods that you want your child to eat and role model eating them yourself.
2. Call foods by their names without any moral judgements or labels. A carrot is a carrot, cake is cake.
3. If you want to speak about why we eat certain foods, focus on the positive. Green foods keep us from getting sick, some foods give us quick energy, some foods keep us full longer. You can also focus on taste or texture or traditions. We eat some foods because we like the crunch, others because of a holiday tradition or a special memory.

Help your child listen to what their body is telling them and respect when they say they are done eating. Explain to others what your food parenting choices are and how they can help support you. Often loved ones want to show their love through food, help them do this without pressuring your child to eat or labeling foods as special or better. Food neutrality is a challenge since many of us did not grow up with it – but it’s worth the effort!



Taking Care of Yourself

As much as you feel good about being a parent, it is not easy spending so much of your time with a toddler. It is important that you regularly make time to look after yourself. This may take planning. Even setting up time alone with your partner, if you have one, is often a challenge. Organizing childcare and exchanging childcare with a friend are two ways of doing this. Although arranging time away from your child is a lot of work, you are more effective as a parent if you also look after yourself and your adult relationships.

We all experience stress at some point in our lives. It is important to recognize and deal with the stress of balancing parenting, relationships, job, and money. Early signs of stress can be physical (headaches, chronic colds, nausea) and/or emotional (increased frustration over little issues and/or feeling trapped). Remember to eat well, be active and have regular breaks from your toddler. It's okay to say NO when someone asks you to do "one more thing". Talk to your family and friends about how you are feeling. Stress can be managed!



Positive Parenting

At this age, your child is developing strong feelings like frustration, anger, embarrassment, guilt, and shame. This sometimes leads to temper tantrums where they lose control and don't know how to deal with these strong feelings or don't have the words to talk about them. Be caring, consistent and patient with them. Do not label them as a "bad kid" if they do something wrong. Talk about the behaviour or activity. Say, "biting hurts" instead of "You are bad for biting". Remember, if two parents are involved, the job of parenting and teaching children is shared between both parents.

Here are some strategies that you may find helpful:

- **Redirection:** If your child won't stop the behaviour, redirect them to another activity or space.
- **Time-in** can help children of this age calm down and cope with strong emotions. Time-in involves staying close, offering comfort, and reassuring your child that you understand their feelings.
- **Rewards and Incentives:** These are different than bribery. Rewards are given after the behaviour. Bribes usually occur before the behaviour. For example, "I see you tidied up your toys, thank you. Would you like a story?" instead of "Stop yelling and I'll give you a candy". Food rewards are not a good idea as it develops poor food habits.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Try to catch your child being "good". Hearing things like "great job", "way to go" and "I noticed that you..." encourages them to want to do it again.
- **Physical punishment**—spanking, slapping, hitting, or shaming—can hurt children both physically and emotionally, and should never be used. There are much more effective ways to discipline children.

Healthy Growth & Development

These developmental milestones have been provided to show some of the skills that mark the progress of young children as they learn to communicate. You may use these milestones to help monitor your child's development. For more information visit: [Early child development | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/page/early-child-development)

By age 3 most children can:

- understand "who", "what", "where" and "why" questions
- create long sentences using 5 or more words and talk about past events (for example, trip to grandparents' house, day at childcare)
- tell simple stories
- show affection for favourite playmates
- engage in multi-step pretend play (for example, cooking a meal, repairing a car)
- be understood by most people outside of the family, most of the time
- be aware of the function of print (for example, in menus, lists, signs)
- have a beginning interest in, and awareness of, rhyming

Early Years Check-In

As a parent or caregiver, you play an important role in your child's growth. The Early Years Check-In is a tool that helps you to identify any concerns about your child's development. The results can be used to start a conversation with an early years professional about any concerns you may have. Use this simple and convenient tool to quickly identify any concerns you may have about how your child is developing. [Early Years Check-In - Welcome | Health HQ](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/professionals/early-years-care/early-years-check-in/welcome.html)



Let's Play

Your child will love to discover the world! They like to compare things, examine things and test things to find out if they will work the same the second and third time they try it. They are a scientist.

They can explore:

- Empty cardboard containers
- Plant seeds and watch for them to grow
- Plastic watering can
- Unbreakable magnifying glass
- Household paint brushes and buckets of water to paint everything outside
- Many sizes of vehicles, blocks, people, pinecones, sticks to put in order from small to large, short to tall, same colour
- Paint easel and non-toxic paint
- Collect things found in nature to look at closely and to make a picture / collage.

Gross motor:

- Tricycle with helmet
- T-ball set
- Balance beam – a 2" x 6" board on the ground
- Play catch with bean bags or throw them into a box

Visit Play & Learn for expert reviewed games and activities to do with your child to help them develop their skills. [Play & Learn - Games and Activities-Early Child Development | Health HQ](#)



Create Your Own

Make a scrapbook of your child's interests. You could include family members, vehicles, dogs, cats or farm animals. Write a sentence about each page in your child's words. This is a great way to help your child learn language and it makes a fun bedtime story book.



Picnic Fun for Everyone!

Let's have a picnic! Pack a lunch and go to the park or have a picnic at home (how much fun would it be to spread out a big blanket or make a tent in the living room!). Maybe dolls and stuffed animals could join in on the fun. Perhaps, play dough creatures could have fun eating pretend "play dough treats".

They Love to Learn!

By the time your child is 3 years old, they should be able to follow 2 to 3 step directions. When cleaning up the toys together, ask your child to find the truck and the ball and then put them in the toy box. While reading books you can ask about the pictures like "Where's the bird?" and "What is the boy doing?" Talk to your toddler when you play together and point out different colours and objects around you. It might take them a while to learn all of the colours and shapes but keep repeating it to them so they will learn. Your child is also starting to learn about the concept of one and more than one. Use a big piece of paper to trace around their body and help them learn about their eyes, ears, hands, arms, and legs. If your child says "foots" instead of "feet" you can just repeat the word "feet".



For More Information

- The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program provides information and home visits to parents who are eligible and need more support during pregnancy, after their baby is born and as their child grows. For more information or to self-refer to the program visit Grey Bruce Public Health's website at [Home Visiting Program](#) (publichealthgreybruce.on.ca) Call Grey Bruce Public Health at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456 extension 5.
- 211 quickly and confidentially connects people to social services and community programs across Ontario. 211 is available by phone for those looking to speak to a friendly voice or by text, online search, email or chat. Service is available in multiple languages.
- Call 811 to find health services or information or get health advice from a registered nurse. Toll free TTY line: [1-866-797-0007](#). Live chat is also available. [Health811 - Health811 \(ontario.ca\)](#)
- Looking for guidance about food and nutrition, including infant and child feeding? Residents of Ontario can connect with a Registered Dietitian to access free nutrition information and advice by calling 811 or starting a chat at [Health811](#).
- Caring for Kids, a website developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society, provides parents with information about their child's health and well-being. [Home | Caring for kids \(cps.ca\)](#)
- EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free programs for families and children from birth to 6 years old. You can learn and play with your child, meet people and get advice from early childhood professionals.
- Find an EarlyON child and family centre: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-earlyon-child-and-family-centre>
 - For more information about Grey County: <https://www.grey.ca/resident-services/community-services/early-learning-and-child-care/earlyon>
 - For more information about Bruce County: <https://www.brucecounty.on.ca/human-services/earlyon>
- Discover how to prevent injuries before they happen – [Parachute: www.parachutecanada.org/injury-topics](#)
- Eat Right Be Active – [A Guide for Caregivers of Preschoolers Ages 3-5: ERBA-3-5-2018.pdf \(nutritionconnections.ca\)](https://nutritionconnections.ca/)