

BANANAS *Growing Together* HANDOUT:

Child development issues for families and child care providers

Living with Ones and Twos

Tricks of the Trade

Toddlers may be more cooperative in child care or with other adults than they are at home. Since part of toddler rebellion involves separating from parents, they may not feel the same strong need to show independence from non-family members.

Parents should not get overwhelmed by feelings of guilt when things go wrong – when a child is sick, when there is a problem at child care, when the house doesn't get cleaned....

When problems do arise in child care, communication is key to a solution. The provider needs to be clear about what the problem is and the parent needs to share what is happening at home.

Parents with lively little ones can't do it all. This is the time to encourage (demand) more help from all family members and to prioritize tasks. Let some things go until your child is older and you have more time.

Parents need time alone and time with other adults in order to return to parenting with a fresh view of the world.

Ones and twos are truly a challenge to parents and child care providers! During this important transitional time between babyhood and childhood, both adults and children need to adjust to a series of new developmental stages and stresses. While each child is unique, here are some general characteristics of ones and twos:

- They are highly mobile – crawling, exploring, walking, running....
- They understand much more than they can verbalize. This can lead to frustration and tantrums.
- They assert themselves as they begin to separate from their parents. These actions leave them feeling powerful and excited as well as anxious and afraid.
- They struggle to find a comfortable balance between independence and dependence.
- They are very egocentric and enjoy playing by themselves. They can also be very aggressive and need to begin to learn limits.

There are also some common adult reactions to this age group:

- **Ambivalence** about the emerging independence of the child. Adults can have mixed feelings watching an adorable baby grow into a temper-tantrum-throwing toddler.
- **Frustration** as the child goes back and forth between needing adult help with basic tasks (eating, dressing, etc.) and rejecting assistance because he wants to do it himself!
- **Exhaustion** as one tries to keep up with all their energy.

Developmental Issues

All children develop at their own pace which is why some begin walking at seven months and others don't start until well after a year. These differences are perfectly normal and are no cause for concern. Some knowledge of child development is helpful in determining why a child is behaving in a certain way and deciding how to respond. Here are some of the common developmental areas which are of particular interest to parents and child care providers of one and two-year olds:

Eating – Babies grow at a tremendous rate during the first year of life and often eat accordingly. By the time they become toddlers, their growth rate and appetites usually slow down and many become “picky” eaters. A toddler's reduced appetite can be very worrisome for parents who are used to feeling totally responsible for and involved in feeding an infant. Trust a child's appetite at this age and don't hover or demand that the child eat. Give the child nutritious choices and set a good example. Healthy toddlers will eat when they are hungry and it is best not to turn eating into a power struggle.

Motor Skills – Children make tremendous physical strides during this time and master many new motor skills: standing up, walking, climbing up and down stairs, throwing objects, stacking blocks. They are justifiably proud of their accomplishments. It is appropriate

for adults to also show pride in their progress. It's natural to clap when a toddler begins "toddling" and many little children clap for themselves whenever they master a new skill. Encourage this pride in accomplishment because it, in turn, builds self-esteem and sets the stage for the child to try other new activities.

Children must work hard to master a new skill – running and then tripping, running and tripping again, over and over until they can finally run without falling. Bumps and bruises frequently accompany these efforts. Parents and child care providers must walk a delicate line between protecting a child from harm without hindering a child's mastery of new physical skills. Provide the child with a safe environment (removing breakables, padding the corners of tables, etc.) and don't intervene unless the activity is truly dangerous. Encourage persistence by downplaying minor accidents. If the adult says something lighthearted – like "*Oh, did you fall down and go boom? Get up, you're okay*" – the child will probably be up playing again in a minute. On the other hand, if the adult makes a BIG DEAL out of every minor bump, the child will respond accordingly.

At this age children learn through their senses, not by reasoning. They also learn by imitation, so it's more appropriate to SHOW toddlers how to do something than to TELL them. Take advantage of this age group's desire to imitate by beginning to teach them new tasks – brushing teeth, tossing clothes in a hamper, putting away toys.... Even if the first attempts at a new task may be frustrating for everyone, encourage and praise the effort.

Sleeping – This is a transitional time from the parent's playing a major role in the child's falling asleep to the child's learning some self-soothing skills. If they haven't done so,

most parents move toddlers out of their bedroom (or bed) into a separate room. Parents may choose this time to begin weaning their children, and replacing breastfeeding and rocking with other tried and true bedtime rituals – bath, then book, then bed. Pacifiers and "blankies" may take the place of bottle or breast. This can be a difficult time for some parents because it may be hard to "let go" of baby. Parents should be truly ready to make a major change before attempting it. Stopping and starting a bedtime activity only gives a child mixed messages and causes confusion. Learning to go to sleep by oneself is an important developmental accomplishment which parents should encourage.

Toilet Training/Learning – While some toddlers master this skill fairly early, most children don't become toilet trained until they are around three. This issue can become emotionally charged especially when parents want to enroll children in child care programs which only accept "potty trained" children or when grandparents or friends think a child is "too old" to still be in diapers. Pressure and negative attention are counterproductive. While parents can readily train *themselves* to rush the child to the bathroom, children really can't be toilet-trained until they are READY. A child is ready when he or she is...

- dry for long periods of time
- able to indicate that the diaper is wet or needs changing
- able to tell an adult s/he needs to go to the bathroom
- able to remove outer clothing (shorts, pants, etc.)

The older the child is when potty training begins, the quicker he or she will catch on. It may be inconvenient for a caregiver if a child wants training pants before she has real control. But it's no reason to keep the child in diapers. Likewise, it may be frustrating for a toddler to say

"Uh, oh" and then pee on the carpet. But it shows that the child has learned to recognize his bodily functions. Offer lots of praise for doing it right while ignoring accidents. This puts the attention on the child mastering the skill. Scolding, shaming, or leaving a child on a potty chair for a long time are inappropriate, punitive and may even hinder the toilet training progress. If you've tried everything and nothing works, accept the fact that your child isn't ready. Lighten up and try again in a few months.

Behavioral Issues

Ones and twos can be very volatile and changeable as they learn to assert their independence. One minute they are sunny and want a hug and the next minute they are saying NO. Children this age are learning that they are separate beings and that they can get their own way. They are also a whirlwind of energy and can get into trouble in the blink of an eye. Supervision is important. Tantrums begin during these years along with hitting, biting and other less-than-charming interactions. Channeling these behavior traits in positive directions is a challenge for adults.

Managing Energy – You can't turn off the energy level, so you need to learn to manage it or work around it. Park your car two blocks away from your destination to wear your little one down a bit before he has to sit in a shopping cart or in a clinic waiting room. Plan an area inside the house where she can jump or climb safely. Spend lots of time outdoors: on walks, at parks and tot lots.

Routines Help – Young children like the known. They will do an activity over and over or beg for the same story night after night. It makes them feel secure to have a routine – to eat and play and sleep about the same time each day. They also like rituals such as a lullaby just before lights

out. If your family schedule is hectic and unpredictable, work toward more structure.

Why Some Conflict Is Inevitable and Necessary – This is a time when a child's push for independence can easily lead to conflict. For example, suppose a parent wants the child to hurry to be on time for a doctor's appointment while the child wants to put on her own shoes – on her hands, on the wrong feet, in her own way. Such encounters have the potential for frustration and anger as the parent and child "lock horns" over what each wants. The child is too young to be able to avoid the conflict. It is the adult's responsibility to set the direction for these exchanges by using one of the following tactics:

- diverting or distracting the child
- taking the issue head on
- letting the child do it his or her way

Which choice is right depends on the situation and the individuals involved. Adults will know that they have delayed too long or made the wrong choice when they end up so frustrated that they eventually blow up at the child. Parents and caregivers need to find ways to give children as much power and independence as is reasonable and age-appropriate without totally surrendering. For example, it is reasonable and appropriate for an 18-month old to want to take off his own clothes at bath time. It is not reasonable for the whole family to wait while a two-year old dresses. Nor is it age-appropriate to let a small child control his or her parents.

Suggestions for Dealing With Ones and Twos – Diversion, redirection and exclusion from an activity are all appropriate choices at different times. Child "psychology" also plays a role. Offer acceptable alternatives, such as "*Would you like a banana or an apple?*" instead of asking "*Would you like*

some fruit?" Ask "*What do you want before naptime—a story or a lullaby?*" not "*Do you want to take a nap?*" It's better not to give children any choice at all if parents aren't prepared to accept a "no" – especially since at this stage, NO is their answer of choice!

Children this age are asking for limits. Diversion doesn't always work. For example, a loud, firm, serious "NO" is more appropriate than distracting the child from a dangerous situation. It's not advisable to always try to be pleasant when a child is pushing you. There is nothing wrong with having anger in your voice when a child persists in biting you. Children need to learn that some activities make people angry. This is a more appropriate kind of anger than "blowing up" at minor misbehavior because you are trying too hard to be self-contained.

Figure out whether the child knows s/he is doing something wrong. Is he throwing rocks at the dog because he just came back from a vacation where he could throw rocks in the lake? Is she testing you by doing something she knows will make you angry? Is he unhappy because of some other change in his life – a new baby, a move, a visit from relatives? Thinking about what the behavior means to the child may help you decide what to do about it.

The response may be different if the child's behavior is spontaneous as opposed to a deliberate action the child already knows is off-limits. If the behavior seems aimed at getting your attention, then that's a cue to spend more time engaged in positive activities with the child. Time-outs will work for some children. Remove the child from the activity and make him or her sit in a chair or on a couch. You may need to sit with or even hold the child. The time-out should be very short – a minute or less. Children at this age have no concept of time: it's the interruption

of the activity that is important.

Carefully analyze situations of frequent conflict. If you get angry because a toddler always takes his shoes off, let him go barefoot more often. If your eighteen-month old drives you nuts by climbing out of the crib, get a youth bed. If your little one likes to draw on the walls, don't let her use the marking pens without supervision. Not all situations can be handled this way, but it makes sense to use this approach whenever it is feasible and easy to avoid conflict.

Toddler Aggression – Ignoring some kinds of behaviors may work, but when toddlers hurt each other, adults should intervene. Children may think you approve of this activity if you allow it to happen. The key is to be stern without yelling. You don't want the aggressor to be too frightened to think. You want him or her to listen. Children learn from clear messages – like "*You may not hurt other people,*" or "*I cannot let you hurt other people.*" Since they also learn by imitation, it is counterproductive and confusing to try to stop children from hurting others by spanking or slapping them. In child care, of course, this is against the regulations.

Biting can be a big problem at this age. Adults tend to get much more upset about biting than about hitting or kicking. Try to teach children to use words when they are frustrated (not so easy with under-twos) and also try to be extra vigilant when a chronic biter is around other children. Biting a child back doesn't carry the message you want. Letting the biter comfort the victim (if the victim will allow it) or showing the child the mark and firmly saying that it hurts, may have some effect. Biters outgrow this tendency and few, if any, grow up to be vampires! (For more information, see BANANAS' "No Bites!" Handout.)

Temper Tantrums – Many factors contribute to tantrums: for one, the verbal ability of children this age has not caught up with their understanding – they may have difficulty expressing themselves and tantrums can result; also, their whirlwind energy can lead to overexcitement or exhaustion; and, finally, the strong pull for independence can pit them against a parent, provider or another child and bring on a tantrum. All children this age have tantrums – some more frequently or dramatically than others. You are not a bad parent (or child care provider) if your child throws a tantrum. But how you respond is important. Above all, don't have a counter tantrum. You may intimidate the child into abandoning his tantrum at that moment. However, in the long run, you have set the example that temper tantrums are acceptable. Try to remain calm. (This is not so easy since children frequently throw their tantrums in the most public and embarrassing places.) A patient response along with some attempt to help the child calm down is the best approach.

Some children respond to being held; others want to be left alone. Some children can be diverted; others have to cry themselves out. Sometimes you can remove the child from the situation and end the tantrum. Sometimes, you can remove

yourself from the scene (walk into a nearby room), thus eliminating the audience. Doing this may keep you from blowing up. Your role as the adult is to insure that the child doesn't hurt himself or others and to teach the child that tantrums are not acceptable behavior. It is possible to pacify the child without giving in to the demand that set off the scene.

Once you and your child have both calmed down, you can analyze the situation. Does the child always have a tantrum when she is hungry or overstimulated?... on days when her nap is short?... or at night when bedtime is delayed? If you can see a pattern in the tantrums, you may be able to change a child's schedule and avoid at least some occurrences. However, you probably won't be able to avoid them all. Do the best you can and, remember, if not encouraged, most children outgrow temper tantrums within a year or two.

Making a Difference

Living with ones and twos can be frustrating, delightful, exhausting and exciting – but never dull. One- and two-year olds are growing up and becoming their own people. They are learning from the world around them and especially from the adults in their lives. New brain research shows:

- Children's early experiences shape the way they will learn, think and behave for the rest of their lives.
- Early attachments strongly influence brain development.
- Children experience the world through their senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting.
- The brain operates on a "use it or lose it" principle.

By providing infants and young children with positive emotional, physical and intellectual experiences, everyone who cares for infants and young children – parents, family, friends, caregivers – plays a crucial role in their development.

*(This Handout is based in part on a workshop given by **Meg Zweiback**, P.H.N. & child care consultant.)*

For more information, see our Handouts: "Setting Limits" and "Separating from Infants and Toddlers." These and other Handouts are available by mail, at our office or by downloading from our website. BANANAS also has an extensive video lending library, including ...

- *Once Upon a Potty for Him* – a toilet training video for parents and children to watch together.
 - *Terrific Two's* – characteristics of two-year olds and how to help them learn self-control.
 - *Developing Child* – toddlerhood, physical and cognitive development.
- For a full listing of our videos, ask for our video list or view it online.

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Revised 2002.

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