



Stages of Play: 12- 24 Months Young Toddlers Solve Problems

What Does It Do?

Toddlers are learning how objects are used together. This is why they enjoy filling-and-dumping water, sand, and blocks. Toddlers are also discovering the connections between objects—the reason they like placing little people on a toy bus. Toddlers are learning about sizes as they stack rings. They are noticing similarities when they line up two toy cars that look the same.

Toys to Explore:

- Pop-beads or chunky interlocking plastic blocks
- Plastic spoon and cup
- Blocks and bucket
- Nesting cups/rings or shape-sorters
- Busy box with button to push, switch, and dial to turn
- Chunky wooden puzzles

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Offer toys like these to your toddler and just watch to see what she does. Let her try to figure out how they work and discover what she can do with them.
- Then show your toddler how to use these toys in new ways. For example, you might put the spoon in the cup and stir. Then hand it to her and see what she does. Or pretend to give her stuffed bear a sip.

First Friends and Early Social Skills

Beginning at about 12 months, most young toddlers enjoy playing near peers. They may play games like “Ring Around the Rosie” or “chase” with another child, or join a peer in filling a bucket with mulch on the playground. These moments may not last long, but they give toddlers a sense of what it means to be a friend and have a friend.

Toys to Explore:

- Musical instruments
- Sand/water play
- Art activities, such as painting or chalk
- Toy cars or trains, with one available for each child

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Create a toddler band by giving each child an instrument or scarf to shake along to the music. Or give each toddler a paint brush and unroll a long roll of paper so everyone has a place to paint. This helps little ones experience the joy of peers without the pressure of sharing.

- Model the words that children should use when playing with others, including “Hi! I’m Logan”, “Can I play?”, “My turn?”, and “Thank you.” Toddlers will need to hear these words many, many times before they learn to use them.

Can You Hear Me Now? Building Communication Skills

Your one-year-old is communicating with you using a combination of sounds, gestures, and facial expressions. Toddlers then begin using spoken language with one word, but their vocabulary grows steadily. And they understand almost everything you say!

Toys to Explore:

- Toy telephone
- Child-safe mirror
- Dolls, stuffed animals, and puppets

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Use a toy telephone to help your child “talk” to you or grandma. Use dolls or puppets to “talk” with your child. Sit with your child in front of a mirror and say, “hello!” to each other.
- Ask your child to do a “one-step” request—this means asking him to do one thing, such as “get your shoes” or “pick up the ball.” As your child approaches age two, try adding a second step: “Pick up the ball and give it to me.”

They’re Moving Now

Toddlers are learning to walk, run, climb, use stairs, and throw a ball. This means they need lots of active playtime to build strength, balance, and coordination. Because toddlers don’t understand rules yet, they benefit from free play when they can explore their own way.

Toys to Explore:

- Balls of different sizes to throw and chase
- Push toys
- Toys that can be pulled while walking (a toy dog on a string; a wagon)
- Tunnel (purchased or homemade from a moving box)
- Child-size stool to climb onto and jump off of (with supervision)

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Create a toddler obstacle course where your child has a chance to crawl (through a moving box), climb (over a cushion), bounce (on a pile of blankets), and roll toward you for a kiss.
- Throw a soft playground ball and see if your child will run or crawl to get it. Or just roll the ball back-and-forth to one another—a game that builds social skills like turn-taking.