

Toddlers, Transitions & Tears, Oh My!



Transitions can be tricky for toddlers and parents alike. Toddlers frequently race in the other direction when it's time to leave the park, start to protest and cry when they have to have a diaper change or emphatically shout "No!" and refuse to put on their coats when leaving the house. All this new-found "independent thinking" on their child's part can leave parents feeling confused, frustrated and impatient.

Applying the principles of Smart Love[®] can help parents understand how children experience transitions and help their kids move from one activity to another in a peaceful and timely manner.

Over the course of normal development, children demonstrate an emerging desire to make and pursue their own choices. Around the time children turn one, they "become much more aware of the world around them and increasingly know what they want and that sometimes they want something different from what their parent wants." For example, if a one-year-old is engaged in an activity that interests her and you pick her up to change her, she may cry because she can now remember that she was doing something she didn't want to leave. She is maturing right on schedule. She isn't being difficult or contrary. Knowing this can help you avoid taking your child's protests personally. You can then soothe and comfort your child as she gently transitions to another activity. Your child will learn that even though she can't always have what she wants,

she can always rely on your comfort and understanding. So for diaper changes, bring the toy along with your child to the changing table or spread out a cloth and change her right where she is playing.

Toddlers demonstrate an unswerving determination and are convinced they are so powerful that they can do and have anything. The words "I want" and "no" predominate in their growing vocabularies. Children at this age, want what they want when they want it. It is a normal, age-appropriate developmental stage, and it's helpful to know that it's time-limited.

Invariably, all toddlers become easily distracted from the task of leaving. They dawdle and demonstrate absolutely no sense of urgency when it comes to transitioning from one place to another. The important thing is not to blame your child for having difficulty stopping an enjoyable activity in order to do something else. They do not yet have the maturity to understand the importance of doctor's appointments, or that they need to leave the park in order to take their sibling to school or to have lunch. Instead expect the delays, leave yourself plenty of extra time, and try to stay calm.

For example, if your child is having difficulty leaving the park, you can say "I know how much fun we are having at the park but we have to leave soon to go home for lunch. Would you like to choose one more thing to do before we go?" You can offer a choice of the slide or the swing. And then you can help ease the transition to the car by talking about a favorite toy or some favorite songs you can listen to on the way home.

A young child needs kindness, understanding and lots of tactful help from her parents as she

learns to make transitions. When we are able to offer this, we preserve our child's inborn sense of feeling loved, lovable and understood. And our relationship with our child will continue to deepen and grow. This relationship is the most powerful tool we have in raising a happy and successful child.

Tips for Toddler Transitions

- It is normal for toddlers to want what they want when they want it! They will naturally outgrow this intense need.
- Gratify as many of your toddler's wishes as you can, so that when you have to interfere with her wishes for health and safety reasons, she will be more willing to accept your guidance.
- Try to be diplomatic and friendly during transitions so they will go as smoothly as possible.
- Make transitioning to the new activity fun (singing songs together, racing, marching or skipping) or describe the new activity or destination so that it appeals to your toddler ("When we get there we can paint or draw or play with that cool truck.")
- Planning ahead and allowing plenty of time will help you avoid power struggles. Toddlers are too immature to understand the importance of getting some where on time.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism[®]. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapyschic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2019 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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