

What's Up? Your Baby's Development

15-Month Visit



Your toddler is using all her new physical, thinking, and language skills to be a good problem-solver. She might push a stool to the counter and try to climb up as she points to a plate of cookies and says something like “Mine!” *How do you see your toddler figuring things out?*

What Your Baby Can Do

I'm using my body to explore and learn.

- I am walking and might be running and climbing.
- I can scribble with a crayon and build a block tower.
- I can feed myself.

I'm using language to understand the world around me.

- I can understand simple questions and directions such as “Kick the ball to me.”
- I communicate by combining sounds and actions—pointing to a cup and saying *wawa* for water.
- By 18 months, I may say as many as 20 words.

I'm beginning to understand how my actions affect others' feelings, too.

- I may try to comfort someone who seems sad.
- I repeat sounds and actions that make someone laugh.
- My feelings can be hard for me to handle. I may start having tantrums and will need your help to calm down.

I'm becoming a good problem-solver.

- I may do something over and over to figure out how it works.
- I use objects the way they are supposed to be used—such as talking on a toy telephone.
- I imitate what I see others do—such as trying to wipe the table with a sponge.

What You Can Do

Encourage your child to use his fingers and hands to explore.

Let him scribble, tap a toy piano, or hold a bubble wand.

Play “Baby Olympics.” Create some safe challenges—such as climbing over a stack of pillows—for your child to master.

Ask your child questions: “Would you like yogurt or a banana for snack?”

Put her gestures into words: “You’re pointing at the bird in the sky.”

Read, sing together, and make up rhymes and stories. This builds a love of language and words.

Read books that talk about feelings. Connect what you are reading to your child’s experiences: “That little boy in the book felt sad saying good-bye to his daddy, just like you do sometimes.”

Stay calm during tantrums. Take deep breaths, count to 10, or whatever helps you to not react. Staying calm helps your child recover more quickly.

Let your child repeat the same activity if he wants to. It may be boring to you, but is important practice for him.

Once your child has learned a new skill, like throwing the ball, add a twist: Set up a laundry basket for him to toss the ball into.

As you use the HealthySteps handouts, remember that your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated and still be growing just fine. Every child develops at his own pace—and your HealthySteps Specialist will be available to answer any questions you may have. Your family’s cultural beliefs and values are also important factors that shape your child’s development.



15–18 Months: What's on Your Mind

My 16-month-old wants to do everything by herself, which just isn't possible sometimes. What can we do?

Be creative. If she wants to feed herself, but can't yet use a spoon, give her one spoon to hold while you feed her with another.

Find an alternative. Explain: "These sharp knives are for Mommy and Daddy to use." Then show him how to use his hands or a blunt plastic knife to cut his food.

Be her coach. Offer just enough support so that she can achieve the goal herself. You might put your hand over hers to help her zip her jacket.

Let your child safely practice new skills. He can practice pouring in the backyard or with a small plastic pitcher in the bathtub.

What It Means for You:

At 18 months old, children begin developing a sense of self-awareness—the knowledge that they are individuals with their own feelings, thoughts, likes, and dislikes. Next, they realize that other people have their own feelings, thoughts, and preferences, too. This helps children learn empathy. They can imagine how another person feels. Help your child develop empathy:

Talk about others' feelings. "Kayla is feeling sad because you took her toy car. Let's give Kayla back her car and then choose another one for you."

Suggest how children can show empathy: "Let's get Jason some ice for his boo-boo."

Show your child empathy. "Are you feeling scared of that dog? He is a nice dog, but he is barking loudly. That can be scary. I will hold you until he walks by."

Did you know... Children begin to understand how others are feeling—to empathize—by 18 months old.¹

What You Can Do:

Support your child in reaching her goal. If her block tower keeps falling, suggest she add some more blocks on the bottom for support.

Do chores together. Pushing a broom, for example, helps children solve problems like how to get the crumbs into the dust pan.

Teach your child to ask for help. When you see him getting frustrated as he tries to solve a problem, you might say: "It can be hard to get that jack-in-the-box to pop up! Would you like some help?" [If yes—] "Let's try turning this knob together."

Spotlight on Problem Solving

The ability to solve problems is very important for being successful in school and in life. When you see your toddler getting into everything, think of it as her way of problem-solving—figuring out how things work.

Toddlers problem-solve by using their bodies and their minds to make a plan to reach their goals. For example, toddlers are solving a problem when they tip over a sippy cup to see how to make the liquid come out.

Toddlers are also solving problems by using their past experiences to help them understand new situations. For example, your child may begin throwing things into the trash—garbage or not. He is remembering that throwing his napkin out after lunch makes you happy. He just hasn't learned yet what not to toss out!

Children also learn how to solve problems by imitating what the people who care for them do. So when they see these adults staying calm and not giving up when they face a challenge, children learn to keep trying, too.

How do you see your toddler solving problems?

At this visit the pediatric team will measure your baby's length, weight, and head. They'll listen to your baby's heart and look at her eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Your baby will receive any needed immunizations. We will talk about your baby's development and routines like sleeping and eating. We'll also review safety guidelines. And, of course, we'll make time to discuss any questions or concerns you might have!

1. Repacholi, B. M., & Gopnik, A. (1997). Early reasoning about desires: Evidence from 14- and 18-month-olds. *Developmental Psychology*, 33, 12–21.