



PLAY FROM ONE TO TWO

One-year olds are busy! There is so much to explore. New words to share, new feelings to experience, and new ways to move and use their bodies. Often fun, and sometimes overwhelming (for you both!), this is a great age to model all sorts of things in play. From providing comfort to a favorite bear, to persisting through difficult problem solving tasks, to sharing new words and ideas, play provides the perfect context for learning and connecting!

CONNECTION

Toddlers often have the reputation of being selfish and irrational. But actually, kids this age have a pretty advanced understanding of other people's emotions. They know when adults are upset, even when those emotions aren't directed at them. They are even often willing to share their favorite toys with others. Talking about emotions and feelings during low-pressure situations like play helps children get better at reading and understanding other people's internal states and emotions. And, the more caregivers use emotion-talk during play, the more likely children will be to show what researcher's call, "emotion-based helping behavior," like passing a blanket to someone who is cold. In this way, play can be a powerful empathy-builder.

COMMUNICATION

You might have heard that babies need to hear lots of words to learn language. But in reality, this isn't the full picture. New research shows that back-and-forth exchanges are key. When you are talking or playing together, help your baby be an active part of the conversation. Encourage them to respond to what you say, and make sure to pause long enough for them to respond. When they do, whether it is a word, sound, or gesture, build off what they communicate and add to it. Research shows that these bouts of back-and-forth communication are physically changing and strengthening the language regions in your child's brain!



EXPLORATION

First they pulled all the books off the shelf, now the socks are all over the floor, and next? Who knows! At this age, babies play with about 30 or more things every hour. And they usually aren't just sitting playing with their toys. Research shows that at this age, children spend just as much time, if not more, playing with household items than with toys. It is easy to think of young toddlers as easily distracted, and sometimes caregivers worry that their baby isn't "focused-enough" on a single toy to "learn" much. But, short bursts of varied play is totally normal at this age. So do your best to keep up and play along. This "exuberant activity," as researchers describe it, is a key part of toddlers' cognitive development!