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15-18 Months

Your child is acquiring new motor skills and understanding. Children of this age are usually walking alone, crawling stairs, and showing more interest in objects and toys. They also roll balls, stack a few blocks, and begin simple shape sorting. Scribbling is fun (in safe places of course!) Your child's ability with self-feeding continues to grow.

An understanding of your words and language increase at this age. Children have a great deal of body action such as pointing, grunting, pulling you, struggling to open the refrigerator, etc. They use jabber or a series of sounds you will not understand but the sounds may indicate their interest or feelings. They may use words such as "what's that," "see it," or quizzical sounds as they point at objects. Jabbering and gestures may be the bulk of communication, but many children acquire at least 6-15 words during this period.

Autonomy, or a sense of self direction, is normal and necessary at this age. Appreciate this stage as your child tests his/her abilities. Allow for success, accomplishments, and just plain fun every day!

Behavior and Guidance

Children are most comfortable if they are in a child-appropriate, safe, and interesting environment. Having a variety of challenges and fun each day keeps children happily involved and prevents a great deal of misbehavior. Consider the following:

- Encourage speech by talking and reading to your child.
- Talk during routine car rides and shopping trips.
- Point out body parts on your child and on dolls, stuffed animals, etc.
- Name household objects.
- Encourage conversation (i.e. toy telephones).
- Use your child's name in conversation.
- Use picture books every day especially ones with familiar objects and books that require actions like patting, touching, etc.



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- Give one step requests such as “bring the ball” and “get the book.” Then test two step commands to see what your child is remembering.
- Challenge curiosity with toys that reinforce interests such as buses, airplanes, miniature lawnmowers, miniature kitchen sets, etc.
- Allow supervised water play both inside and out.
- Remember to blow some bubbles.
- Encourage cuddly toys such as animals and/or dolls for security and imaginative play.
- Bright balls of various sizes are fun.
- Allow a little mess making such as play dough, helping parents cook, etc. (Hint: daycare even allows finger painting with pudding and shaving cream!)
- Use active push=pull toys, shopping carts, wagons, etc.
- Allow for combining and changing toys – pops bead, blocks, large Legos, etc.

Remember, play has most value when encouraged by you. Allow some independent play and encourage self-direction a little every day. It is not too early to monitor and limit TV.

Nutrition

Children are usually on table food and/or baby food at this age with the baby food steadily decreasing. They are using a cup for drinking (unless nursing) and should no longer be using a bottle (especially a bedtime bottle.) If your child is still using a bottle we strongly encourage discontinuing use at this time. Continue to expect a small appetite. Offer small portions and as much variety as possible.

Encourage utensils but expect hands to be used frequently. Juice is not recommended unless your pediatrician has otherwise specified. Your child needs only whole milk and water to drink. Juice has excess sugar and minimal nutrition. Eating the whole fruit is a much better option!

Avoid choking hazards -peanuts, popcorn, hard candy, whole hot dogs, whole grapes, and similar food items. Monitor your child as he/she eats. Be very careful at parties and social occasions where dangerous foods may be accessible to toddlers.



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Sleep

A predictable bedtime routine carried out in your child's bedroom is recommended. Sometimes there are nightmares at this age. Quick reassurance with the light out or dim is best. Minimal attention to waking is usually the best policy. If you are having difficulties with your child's sleep, we will be glad to discuss them with you.

Toilet Training

Early awareness of feelings of being wet and realizing when they "go" are normal at this age. Take notice of your child's awareness. Use words for urine and bowel movements. Your child will need to be able to verbalize her/his need to use the toilet. Allow a potty chair or toilet adaptor and support for feet if your child wants to try the potty. No pressure is necessary, just support for learning and your help and encouragement.

If your child is not showing signs of potty training readiness, that is okay. You can still introduce the potty and leave it out for the child to see and play with if desired. This will decrease any intimidation the potty may pose.

Safety

- Your infant should remain in a car seat that is rear-facing for a minimum of 2 years. Check the height and weight requirements as you may need to invest in a larger rear facing convertible car seat as your child grows.
- Lock back doors and use gates for potentially dangerous areas such as bathrooms, basements, etc. Install window guards on upstairs windows and place outlet covers in all electrical outlets.



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- Always directly supervise children around swimming pools, bathtubs, treadmills, exercise bikes, etc. Near or in water, keep your child close enough to touch to prevent drowning.
- Lock away poisons, cleaning and lawn supplies, medications (even over-the-counter medications), etc. Poison control may be reached at 1-800-222-1222.
- Report to us if your child eats paint chips, especially during renovations, or if you have any reason to suspect lead poisoning in your child.
- Keep small chokeable objects away from your child.
- Prevent burns and scalds. Turn the hot water thermostat to 120 degrees or less. This will help prevent severe scalding even if your child turned on the hot water accidentally. Keep all hot liquids out of reach and do not carry your child while carrying a hot liquid. Turn pan handles to the back of the stove and be especially cautious around irons, space heaters, fireplaces, and curling irons/hair straighteners.
- Remember plastic bags and un-inflated balloons or balloon pieces are potential choking and suffocation hazards.
- Consider carefully the safest method of carrying your child on a bicycle. If you decide to carry your child on a bicycle, helmets are needed for both of you!
- If guns are owned, store unloaded and locked with ammunition locked separately from the gun.

A Few Words on Being a Parent

We hope you are developing confidence in dealing with normal misbehaviors. Remember, ignoring some misbehavior and distraction are two helpful techniques. Try to avoid criticism for curiosity and phrase your concerns in a positive manner. For example, instead of “do not touch that plant,” use “play over here.” Instead of “stop tearing the book,” try “books are for looking and reading.” Other applications of this principle are “food is for eating,” and “I will need to put it away.”



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Parents need support and understanding from each other. Realize that dealing with the evolving personality and emerging development is a challenge and huge responsibility that can best be shared and handled together. The little person in your home will benefit from parents and a caring adult's presence with consistent care and understanding. Keep your sense of humor! And do not forget, we are available to discuss any concerns or issues you may have during this time.