

Toddler Development

This article is courtesy of Veronica Scott

Toddler Development: Give your toddler an educational advantage the easy way

There has been a lot of media hype in recent years concerning educational toys, movies and games. To hear some experts talk, the ability to get into an Ivy League college is somehow linked to a particular toy or game that the child had at the age of three! Educational games and activities are certainly an important part of a toddler's overall education. However, many of today's parents become so caught up in the hype that they forget the most critical element in a toddler's development: **themselves**. Here is a parents' guide to giving your toddler a leg up the easy way.

Talk to Your Child

Children tend to be extremely intense and inquisitive in their toddler years. Most of us are quite busy, juggling numerous concerns. It can be quite easy to tune out a constantly talking child, or simply give surface-level answers. However, taking time out for conversation is one of the most important things that a parent can do for toddler development.

Talk to your child as if he were an adult. Give short but accurate answers to her questions. Keep up a running dialogue of the things you are doing, both how and why, even if it's just heating up leftovers or cleaning the sink. Obviously, many things will go over the child's head. However, toddler aged children have a unique ability to absorb things almost by osmosis. He or she will likely ask questions or become motivated to help. Meanwhile, the dialogue will improve your child's vocabulary as well as fostering an atmosphere of trust and bonding in your relationship.

Turn Everyday Experiences into Learning Opportunities

Educators speak of "teachable moments", those times when a child is receptive to learning. In fact, daily life is filled with teachable moments. A trip to the grocery store could become a lesson in counting, colors or shapes. Even a carnival or amusement park can offer lessons in letters, numbers and colors. Have fun and allow your child to do the same, but always keep your eyes open for chances to practice skills within the context of the situation for your toddler development.

Play With Your Child

Putting your child on the couch in front of the latest and greatest educational DVD is a reasonable way to take a break from the intensity. However, the TV or computer should never replace one on one time. Be sure that the child has plenty of hands-on toys such as dolls, building blocks and toy cars. Make it a point to get down on the floor with your child and enter into his or her play world. Make up stories together. Build things from Legos together. Entering into your child's play will help you to understand what he is thinking and feeling, and help you to respond in ways that he can assimilate.

Relax

Many parents are overly concerned about their children's academic and social progress. Remember that toddler development occurs in fits and starts. Whatever pace your child develops at is normal for him. It is helpful to be aware of the average ages at which children generally hit certain milestones, so that you can spot a problem if it develops, but avoid the urge to obsess. If you are ever concerned, you can discuss the situation with the child's pediatrician. Most of the time, however, you will find that your child is slightly ahead in some areas and slightly behind in others. This is perfectly normal and no cause for alarm.

The Bottom Line

Educational DVDS, games and toys can be a helpful part of a toddler's development. However, it is important to resist the temptation to rely exclusively on these tools. The most important part of your toddler's education is you. Talk to your child, explain the things that you do, make time for play, and look for teachable moments in everyday life. Relax and resist the urge to overly monitor your toddler development progress. Both you and your child will be just fine.