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Tips for Keeping Children Safe: A Developmental Guide - Toddlers

The toddler years are a time when children are building skills in all areas. They remember what they learn and share it with others. They understand things more deeply, make choices, and engage with others in new ways. The changes in their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development help them to build new skills that prepare them for school and later learning.

During the toddler years, children begin to use their large and small muscles in new ways. They like to go fast and practice running, jumping, kicking, and throwing. Although unsteady at first, with practice, many children begin to climb stairs by the time they reach age 2. By 2-and-a-half, most toddlers have generally mastered stairs and are ready to begin climbing more challenging playground equipment. But as their mobility increases, so do the safety hazards. Caregivers need to supervise their activity closely, especially when toddlers are climbing. As for children of all ages, playground surfacing in outdoor play areas must meet regulations so that it cushions toddlers' many falls. Safety gates are another important piece of safety equipment for children in this age group.

Toddlers move from mouthing things within their reach (at 1 year old) to using their fingers and hands to manipulate objects (at 2-and-a-half years and older). They also are learning more about their environment. For example, they continue to learn that a hidden object is not permanently gone, remember things that happened, sort things by characteristics, and use language to describe what they experience. They explore their world through their imaginations and the games they play. Yet, all learning requires some level of risk. Until they understand what is safe, a toddler may take risks that can lead to injury. Toddler caregivers remove all hazards from the environment and teach children how to explore and engage in activities safely so they can take advantage of the many learning opportunities that are available.

Toddlers also are learning how to play with other children, but they have little ability to share. They lack the language skills to easily express their feelings. As a result, they depend on trusted adults to teach them how to play with other children, share and take turns, and model how to interact safely with both children and adults. Consistent routines and clear expectations help to reduce the risk of challenging behaviors that may result in injuries both to other children and to adults.

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Last Updated: May 2, 2022