

Getting through those difficult toddler moments

My toddler is pulling at her coat, angrily shouting “Me! Me!” We are already late getting off to nursery due to a ‘toilet incident’, and I’m not listening properly. When I do, I realise she is not being naughty; she is trying to tell me that she wants to put her coat on herself.

The first thing I always try and ask myself about difficult behaviour in toddlers is “Who is finding this difficult?” Often I find it’s just me and my desire for a clean, tidy, on time, well-organised life. If I want my toddler to be independent and enjoy doing things for herself, I need to allow more time and let her make her own choices.

Toddlers have opinions and preferences, just as adults do. (In fact, babies do too as we can see when we take the time to observe them!) It’s therefore a good idea if we can start offering our toddlers choices when appropriate. This isn’t as daunting as it might seem. When I give my daughter two choices I’m happy with, for example, which cereal she’d like for

breakfast, I am giving her a chance to show her preferences. If she asks for porridge, I try really hard to make it work, perhaps asking her to get dressed while I cook it to save time getting dressed afterwards.

I try to have as few rules as possible – usually about things to prevent someone getting hurt or which will cause a major problem of some kind. When I remember this, I’m amazed at how many little ‘rules’ I sometimes try to make my children keep in order to make life easier for me, rather than remembering that having a happy toddler will make everything much easier!

Sometimes my toddler’s behaviour is because I’ve not anticipated what she will need. So the second question I ask myself is: “Why is she acting like this?

Why now?” Young children thrive when they have clear boundaries and daily routines.

When they get tired or hungry, they can display all sorts of difficult behaviour. I’ve found that planning my day around my children’s ever-changing needs for food and sleep takes a while to get used to, but really helps make the day run more smoothly.

Other reasons toddlers can act in ways we find difficult can be to do with transitions: the changes that



come with a new baby, a new house, a new group of people or a new routine of work and childcare. At these times it is important to reassure them of our love and to invest time with them, letting them feel cared for and secure. When significant events are coming up, such as weddings or the birth of a new baby, I love reading books with my girls about this.

Even from a very young age (less than two) my daughters have really enjoyed having time alone with one parent. The dynamic of the relationship is so different and means that we often do quite different things. My husband and I both try and spend one-to-one time with each child, letting them choose what we do and giving them our undivided attention. It’s hard to find time for this, but it’s well worth it, including the benefits from their ‘happier’ behaviour afterwards.

Something I find that I can help my toddler engage in play by giving her ‘invitations to play’. It’s an idea I found on The Imagination Tree website, and involves simply putting toys out in an inviting way. This might be setting up a toy tea party or putting out play dough with a roller and cutters. It also helps to mix things up a bit, moving familiar toys around – for example, putting dinosaurs in the playhouse. Try it! You’ll be surprised how much interest your child will show.



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