

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Secrets Of The Baby Whisperer For Toddlers

Tracy Hogg With Melinda Blau

Contents

Cover

About the Authors

Also by Tracy Hogg with Melinda Blau

Title Page

Dedication

Introduction: Toddler Whispering

The challenge of toddlerhood and how my philosophy applies

Chapter One: Loving the Toddler You Have

Awareness of your child's temperament; how nature and nurture work together

Chapter Two: H.E.L.P. to the Rescue: A Mantra for
Everyday Moments

A strategy to determine when to intervene, and when to encourage independence

Chapter Three: R&R (Routines and Rituals): Easing the
Toddler Tug-of-War

The importance of a structured routine

Chapter Four: Nappies No More: Striding toward
Independence

Issues related to mobility, playing, eating, dressing, and potty

Chapter Five: Toddler Talk: Maintaining a Dialogue through T.L.C.

Talking with your child as she moves from “Banguage” to language

Chapter Six: The Real World: Helping Your Child Rehearse Life Skills

Using everyday moments at home to enhance social and emotional readiness

Chapter Seven: Conscious Discipline: Teaching Your Child Self-Control

Setting limits and helping your child manage his emotions

Chapter Eight: Time-Busters: Sleep Deprivation, Separation Difficulties, and Other Problems That Steal Hours from Your Day

Solving chronic behavior problems

Chapter Nine: When Baby Makes Four: Growing Your Family

Preparing for a second child; dealing with siblings; caring for your relationship and taking time to care for yourself

Epilogue: Some Final Thoughts

Index

Acknowledgments

Copyright

About the Authors

TRACY HOGG is a nurse, lactation educator, and newborn consultant with more than twenty years' experience. Her uncanny ability to understand and calm babies led to her nickname the "baby whisperer." In 1995, she founded Baby Technique, through which she consults with parents individually and organizes and teaches group classes. Originally from England, she lives in Los Angeles and is the mother of two daughters. You can visit her Web site at www.baby-whisperer.com.

MELINDA BLAU is an award-winning journalist specializing in family and health topics. She is the author of ten other books and countless magazine articles. The mother of two grown children, she lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Also by Tracy Hogg with Melinda Blau

*Secrets of the Baby Whisperer: How to Calm, Connect, and
Communicate with Your Baby*

Vermilion books may be obtained from any good bookshop
or by telephoning TBS Direct on: 01206 255 800

Secrets of the Baby Whisperer for Toddlers

Tracy Hogg
with Melinda Blau

Vermillion
LONDON

To Sara and Sophie

INTRODUCTION

Toddler Whispering

As parents, we are our children's first and most important mentors: their guides to life's lessons and adventures.

—Sandra Burt and Linda Perlis, *Parents as Mentors*

The Challenge of Toddlerhood

You know the old saying: “Be careful what you wish for—you just might get it.” If you’re like most parents, I suspect that you spent a good part of the first eight months of your baby’s life wishing things would get easier. Mum prayed he¹ would get over that colicky period, sleep through the night, and start taking solid food. And if Dad is like most men, he probably wished his little man would soon become less of “a blob” and more like the son he dreamed of playing touch football with. You both looked forward to the day Junior would take his first step and say his first word. You happily envisioned the day he’d pick up a spoon, put on a sock, and someday—please God—go potty by himself.

Now that your baby is a toddler, your wishes have come true—and I’ll wager that some days you’d just as soon turn back the clock! Welcome to what is probably the most strenuous and awe-inspiring stage of parenting.

The dictionary defines a toddler as “a small child roughly between the ages of one and three.” Other books mark this phase of childhood when a baby first begins to “toddle,” or walk with short, unsteady steps. For some, this can be as young as eight or nine months. Either way, trust me, if you have a toddler on your hands, *you* know it, no matter what a book tells you.

Though at first your toddler may be a tad shaky on her feet, your little darlin’ is now truly ready to explore people, places, and things—without your help, thank you very much. She is becoming social, too. She loves to imitate. She can clap, sing, dance, and play side by side with other children. In short, she’s more like a miniature person now than a baby. She’s wide-eyed with curiosity, full of energy, and courts trouble constantly. The developmental leaps at

this age are miraculous, but given the rapid changes and the rambunctious moments, it's no wonder you feel like you're under siege. Every container, every object your toddler can grasp, every electrical outlet, every cherished knickknack is fair game. From her perspective, it's all new and exciting; from your perspective, it can feel like an assault on you, your house, and everything in sight.

Toddlerhood clearly marks the end of infancy. It's also a sneak preview of adolescence. In fact, many experts think of this period in the same vein as the teenage years, because a similar separation process is under way. Mum and Dad are no longer the beginning and end of a toddler's world. In fact, as she rapidly acquires new physical, cognitive, and social skills, she also learns how to say "no" to you—a skill that also will serve her well in adolescence.

Now Your Baby Is a Toddler ...

I've been asking mothers what were the most significant changes from infancy to the toddler years, and here's what they said:

"I have even less time for myself."

"She asserts herself more."

"I can't take him to a restaurant."

"She's more demanding."

"It's easier to understand what he wants."

"I'm a slave to her naps."

"I have to chase him around."

“I’m constantly saying ‘no’ to her.”

“I’m amazed at what he can learn.”

“She imitates everything I do.”

“He’s into everything.”

“She tests me all the time.”

“He’s curious about absolutely everything.”

“She’s so much more like ... *a person!*”

Be assured that’s the good news. Indeed, it is through your child’s exploration and struggles (often, with *you*), that your toddler begins to gain mastery over her environment and, most important, gains a sense of herself as a competent and independent being. Of course, you want your child to grow and to become more self-sufficient, even though at times the process is maddening. I know, because I lived through it with my own children who, after all, were my first guinea pigs (and my best students). I think I did a pretty good job with my girls, who are now nineteen and sixteen. But that’s not to say that it has been smooth sailing all the way. Believe me, raising any child is a very difficult job and comes with heaps of frustration and brick walls, not to mention tears and tantrums.

Baby Whispering: The Foundation of Good Parenting

Aside from my own experience, I have counseled countless parents of toddlers—often those whose children I first met as babies—and I can help you get through these difficult years, which I define here as roughly the period from eight months (not so coincidentally where my last book ended) to

two years plus. If you read my first book, *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer*, you already know my philosophy about children. All the better if you adopted a structured routine from the day your baby came home and if you've been using some of my strategies. I daresay you're probably ahead of the game, because you already *think* in a way that will help you with your toddler.

However, I also recognize that some of you are new to my ideas, which were sparked when I first worked with children who had a range of physical and emotional impairments—children who often had no language skills. In my work with disabled children, I had to observe the nuances of their behavior and their body language and make sense of their seemingly unintelligible sounds in order to understand what they needed and wanted.

Later, spending my time almost exclusively with infants (including my own), I discovered that those skills worked just as well with babies. Having cared for over five thousand babies, I fine-tuned what one of my clients dubbed “baby whispering.” It's quite like what a horse whisperer does, but here we're talking about infants. In both cases, we're dealing with sensate creatures, living beings who can't actually talk but express themselves nevertheless. In order to care for and connect with them, we must learn *their* language. Hence, baby whispering means tuning in, observing, listening, and understanding what's happening *from the child's perspective*.

Even though toddlers are beginning to acquire language and express themselves better than newborns do, the same principles of baby whispering that guide my work with infants can be applied to this age group. For those of you who didn't read my first book, below I offer a quick review of its major themes. If you have already read my first book, the following will be familiar. Think of it as a refresher course.

Every child is an individual. From the day a baby is born, she has a unique personality, as well as likes and dislikes of her own. Therefore no one strategy works for all. You have to find out what's right for *your* toddler. In [Chapter One](#), I provide a self-test that will enable you to gauge what kind of temperament your child has, which in turn will help you understand what parenting strategies might work best with her. But even when divided into so-called types, each child is a one-of-a-kind phenomenon.

Every child deserves respect—and must learn to respect others as well. If you were taking care of an adult, you'd never touch, lift, or undress that person without asking permission and explaining what you're about to do. Why should it be any different with a child? As caretakers, we need to draw what I call *a circle of respect* around each child—an invisible boundary beyond which we don't go without asking permission or explaining what we're about to do. And we need to know who that child is before rushing in blindly; we must take into account what he or she feels and desires, rather than just doing what we want. Admittedly with toddlers this can be tricky, because we also have to teach them that the circle of respect goes both ways. Children at this age can be rather demanding and obstinate, and they have to learn to respect us as well. In these pages, I'll teach you how to respect your toddler and meet her needs without compromising your own boundaries.

Take the time to observe, listen, and talk with children, not at them. The process of getting to know your child starts the day he or she comes into the world. I always forewarn parents, "Never assume that your child doesn't understand you. Children always know more than you realize." Even a nonverbal toddler can express himself. Therefore, you have to sharpen your senses and pay attention. By observing, we

begin to understand a toddler's unique temperament. By listening to him, even before he acquires spoken language, we begin to know what he wants. And by having a dialogue—conversing rather than lecturing—we allow the child to express who he really is.

Every child needs a structured routine, which gives his life predictability and safety. This principle, important in the early months of your baby's life, is even more important now that your child is toddling about. As parents and caretakers, we provide consistency and safety through ritual, routines, and rules. We let a child's nature and her growing abilities guide us and tell us how far she can go, and at the same time, remember that we are the grown-ups—we're in charge. It's a paradox of sorts, allowing a child to explore and simultaneously making sure she knows that she has to live within the safe confines we create for her.

The above simple, down-to-earth guidelines provide the foundation upon which a solid family is built. Children thrive when they are listened to, understood, and treated with respect. They thrive when they know what's expected of them and what they can expect of the world around them. At first, their universe is small—limited to their home, their family members, and the occasional outing. If this first environment is safe, relaxed, positive, and predictable, if it's a place where they can explore and experiment, if they can depend upon the people in this tiny world, then they will be better equipped to take on new settings and new people. Remember that no matter how active, curious, difficult, or infuriating your toddler seems at times, for her, it's all a dress rehearsal for the real world. Consider yourself her first acting coach, director, and most adoring audience.

My Intentions: The Road to Harmony

Common sense, you say. Easier said than done, you say, especially when it comes to toddlers. Well, that's true enough, but I have a few toddler techniques up my sleeve that will at least help you understand what your toddler is all about and will, at the same time, give you a greater sense of competency and authority.

Although I've peppered these pages with research from some of the most respected child-development experts of our time, there are plenty of books out there documenting scientific advances. What good is science if you don't know what to *do*? To that end, what you find here will help you see your toddler through fresh eyes and act more responsively toward him. By seeing the world from his perspective, you will gain greater empathy for what goes on in his little mind and body. With hands-on strategies for dealing with the inevitable everyday challenges you both face, you will have an arsenal of tools at your fingertips.

I've outlined below a list of more specific goals. What I'm trying to create here is a solid mooring for your family. It's no accident, by the way, that these goals are equally applicable to older children, even teenagers (although hopefully they don't need potty training!).

This book will encourage, teach, and demonstrate through example, how to:

- *View—and respect—your toddler as an individual.* Rather than categorizing him by age, allow him to be who he is. I believe that children have a right to express their likes and dislikes. I also believe that adults can validate a child's point of view, even when it frustrates us or we don't agree.
- *Cheer your toddler on toward independence—without rushing him.* To that end, I provide tools that will help you gauge her readiness and teach her practical skills, such as eating, dressing, potty training, and basic hygiene. I bristle when parents call to ask, "How can I get my toddler to

walk?” or “What can I do to make my child talk earlier?” Development is a natural phenomenon, not course work. Besides, pushing children is not respectful. Even worse, it sets them up for failure and sets you up for disappointment.

- *Learn how to tune in to your child’s verbal and nonverbal language.* While toddlers are infinitely easier to comprehend than newborns, they vary greatly in their ability to communicate. You must exercise patience and restraint when your child is trying to tell you something, and at the same time, know when to step in and offer your help.

- *Be realistic—toddlerhood is a time of constant change.* Sometimes a parent whose toddler suddenly stops sleeping through the night might ask, “What’s wrong with her?” when in fact, their little girl is just going through another stage of child growth and developing. One of the biggest challenges of parenting a toddler is that just when you get used to a certain kind of behavior or a particular level of competence—bam!—your child changes. And guess what? She’ll change again and again and again.

- *Promote your child’s development and family harmony.* In my first book I promoted my *whole family* approach in which the infant becomes part of the family rather than dominating it. That principle is even more important now. It’s critical to create a happy, safe environment that enables a child to venture forth, and at the same time, keeps him out of harm’s way and doesn’t allow his antics to disrupt the family. Think of your home as a rehearsal hall, where your child learns to practice new skills, memorize his lines, and learn proper entrances and exits. You’re his director, readying him for the stage on which the drama of his life will be played.

- *Help your toddler manage his emotions—particularly his frustrations.* The toddler years mark a time when children take giant emotional steps. In infancy, your child's emotions were based on physical elements, such as hunger, fatigue, hot or cold, and feelings overtook her. As a toddler, though, her emotional repertoire will expand to include fear, joy, pride, shame, guilt, embarrassment—more complex emotions caused by her growing awareness of herself and of social situations. Emotional skills *can* be learned. Studies have shown that children as young as fourteen months can begin to identify and even anticipate mood (theirs and their caretakers'), feel empathy, and as soon as they're verbal, talk about feelings as well. We know, too, that temper tantrums are preventable, or if not caught in time, are at least manageable. But the management of mood is far more important than simply keeping tantrums at bay. Children who learn to moderate high emotions eat and sleep better than children who don't; they have an easier time learning new skills and fewer problems socializing as well. In contrast, children who lack emotional control are often those whom both other children and adults would just as soon avoid.

- *Develop a strong meaningful bond between Dad and your toddler.* I know, I know: it's just not fashionable these days to suggest that Mum has more contact with the children, but in real life that's usually the way it is. In most families, it still takes extra effort for Dad to be more than a Saturday helper. We need to look at ways for fathers to be *truly* involved, connecting emotionally, not just as a play pal.

- *Facilitate your child's becoming a social being.* Toddlerhood is a time when your child starts interacting with others. At first your child's world will be somewhat limited to perhaps only two or three regular "friends," but as he marches toward the preschool years, social skills

become increasingly important. Therefore, he will need to develop empathy, consideration of others, and the ability to negotiate and handle conflict. These skills are best taught through example, guidance, and repetition.

- *Manage your emotions.* Because dealing with a toddler is so demanding, you must learn how to be patient, how and when to praise, how to see that “giving in” isn’t loving (no matter how adorable your toddler acts), how to put your love into action (not *just* words), and what to do when you’re angry or frustrated. Indeed, the most current research on early childhood brings out a fact that is critical to good parenting: your child’s temperament doesn’t just determine her strengths and vulnerabilities, it influences how you treat her. If you have a “handful” of a child who seems to save up her tantrums for public places, unless you learn how to modify your own responses, get help, or exit from a stressful situation, there’s a good chance that you will lose patience quickly, respond sharply, even resort to physical restraint which, sadly, will only make your child’s behavior worse.

- *Nourish your own adult relationships.* Toddlerhood deprives mums of downtime. You need to learn how to spend guilt-free time away from your toddler and to make opportunities (because they may not naturally present themselves) that will enable you to replenish your own reserves. In short, you need to *get* quality time as much as you need to *give* it to your toddler.

Are the foregoing lofty goals? I think not. I see them met in families every day. Certainly it takes time, patience, and commitment. And for working parents, it sometimes involves tough choices—for example, whether or not to come home from the office a bit earlier so that your child doesn’t stay up later than he should.

My intention is to arm you with information, help you feel more secure about your parenting decisions, and support you in discovering your own best approaches. In the end, I hope you will be a more sensitive parent, too, a toddler whisperer who is tuned in, confident, and loving.

How This Book Is Designed

I know that parents of toddlers have even less time for reading than parents of babies, so I've tried to design this book to be a quick read, and equally important, to make sense even if you start somewhere in the middle. Lots of charts and boxes will help you zero in on important concepts and can offer you at-a-glance guidance when you're too busy to actually pore through the pages.

I would suggest, though, that in order to acquaint yourself with my philosophy, you read through [Chapters One, Two, and Three](#) before skipping to particular topics. (I assume you've actually read the [Introduction](#) as well; if you haven't, please do that, too.) In [Chapter One](#), you'll find a discussion of nature and nurture, which work together. The "Who Is Your Toddler?" quiz will help you understand your child's nature—in other words, what he came into the world with. In [Chapter Two](#), I offer "H.E.L.P.," an overall strategy for dealing with the nurture part of the equation. And in [Chapter Three](#), I stress that *toddlers learn through repetition*. I underscore the importance of "R&R"—instituting a structured routine and creating other dependable rituals as well.

[Chapters Four](#) through Nine deal with the specific challenges of parenting a toddler. Read them in order or as particular issues present themselves.

[Chapter Four](#), "Nappies No More," looks at how you can foster your child's growing independence—but not push her before she's ready.

[Chapter Five](#), “Toddler Talk,” is about communication—talking *and* listening—which can be both exhilarating and frustrating when we’re dealing with children in their first two or three years of life.

[Chapter Six](#), “The Real World,” focuses on the all-important move from home to play groups and family outings, and helps you plan “rehearsals for change,” controlled situations that allow your toddler to practice social skills and test out new behaviors.

[Chapter Seven](#), “Conscious Discipline,” is about *teaching* your toddler how to behave. Children don’t come into this world knowing how they’re supposed to behave or the rules of social interaction. If *you* don’t teach your toddler, be assured that the world will!

In [Chapter Eight](#), I talk about “time-busters,” chronic, undesirable behavior patterns that can erode the parent/child relationship and drain time and energy from the whole family. Parents are often unaware of the many ways that they “train” their children ... until the resulting difficulties upset their lives. This *accidental parenting*, a phenomenon I talked about in my first book, is the cause of just about every sleep-related, eating, or discipline issue I see. When parents don’t recognize what’s happening or know how to stop it, the problem becomes a time-buster.

Finally, [Chapter Nine](#), “When Baby Makes Four,” is about growing a family—making the decision about having another child, preparing your toddler and helping her deal with the new arrival, dealing with siblings, and protecting your adult relationships and nurturing yourself in the bargain.

You won’t find many age-related guidelines in these pages, because I believe that you should *look at your own child*, rather than read a book to learn what’s appropriate for her. And whether the subject is toilet training or tantrums, you won’t find me telling you, “This is the right way,” because the greatest gift I can give you is the ability

to figure out *for yourself* what works best for your child and your family.

As a last word, let me remind you that it's important to maintain a long-term outlook and keep a cool head. Just as time didn't freeze when your child was a very young baby—even though it *seemed* as if infancy would never end—toddlerhood is not forever either. During this time, just put away all your valuables, lock cupboards containing poisons, and take a deep breath: For the next eighteen months or so, you've got a toddler on your hands. Right before your very eyes you will watch your little one make that giant leap from a fairly helpless baby to a walking, talking child with a mind of her own. Enjoy the incredible journey. For each amazing new bit of mastery and each thrilling first, there will be electrifying calamities to contend with. In short, nothing you ever experience will be more exhilarating, and at the same time, more exhausting than living with and loving your toddler.

¹ To give a fair representation of gender, the pronouns “he” and “she” are alternated throughout this book.

CHAPTER ONE

Loving the Toddler You Have

It is a wise father that knows his own child.

—William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Babies Revisited

IN THE COURSE of writing this second book, my coauthor and I held a class reunion for some of the babies who had attended my groups. Infants between one and four months old when we last saw them, the five alumni were now in the thick of toddlerhood. What a difference a year and a half had made. We recognized their slightly more mature faces, but physically the tiny dynamos who poured into my playroom bore scant resemblance to the babies I had known—sweet helpless things who could do little but stare at the wavy lines on the wallpaper. Where once holding up their heads or “swimming” on their tummies was a feat, these children were into everything. When their mums plopped them down, they crawled, tottered, or walked, sometimes holding on, sometimes on their own, desperate to explore. Eyes aglow, babbling sense and nonsense alike, their hands reached here, there, and everywhere.

Recovering from the shock of seeing this miracle of instant growth—it was like time-lapse photography without the middle stages—I started to remember the babies I once knew.

There was Rachel, sitting in her mum’s lap, cautiously eyeing her playmates, a bit fearful to venture out on her own. It was the same Rachel who cried as a baby when presented with a stranger’s face and who balked during the class on infant massage, letting us know she wasn’t ready for so much stimulation.

Betsy, one of the first of the babies to actually reach out and touch another child, was clearly still the most active and interactive of all the children, curious about every toy, interested in everyone else’s business. She was extremely frisky as an infant, so it didn’t surprise me when she began

clambering up the changing table with the skill of a monkey and a nothing-can-stop-me look on her face. (Not to worry: Her mum, obviously used to Betsy's athletic feats, kept a close eye on her and a ready hand near her tush.)

Tucker, who had reached every baby milestone on cue, was playing near the changing table. Every so often, he'd glance up at Betsy, but the brightly colored forms of the shape box were more intriguing to him. Tucker was still right on track—he knew his colors and was able to figure out which shapes fit into which holes, just like “the books” said a twenty-month-old could.

Allen was in the play garden by himself, set off from the others, which made me think of his serious-looking, three-month-old self. Even as an infant, Allen always seemed to have a lot on his mind, and he had that same concerned expression now as he tried to insert a “letter” into the play mailbox.

Finally, I couldn't take my eyes off Andrea, one of my favorite babies because she was so friendly and adaptable. Nothing fazed Andrea, even in infancy, and I could see that she was her old unshakable self as I watched her interact with Betsy, now down from her perch and tugging mightily on Andrea's truck. In turn, this self-possessed toddler looked at Betsy and calmly sized up the situation. Without missing a beat, Andrea let go and began playing contentedly with a dolly that had caught her eye.

Though these children had grown light-years ahead of where they had been—in effect, they were six or seven times older than when I last saw them—each was a reflection of his or her infant self. Temperament had blossomed into personality. Babies no more, they were five distinct little people.

Nature/Nurture: The Delicate Balance

The constancy of personality from infancy through toddlerhood comes as no surprise to me or others who have seen scores of infants and children. As I stressed earlier, *babies come into this world with unique personalities*. From the day they're born, some are inherently shy, others stubborn, still others prone to high activity and risk taking. Now, thanks to videotapes, brain scanners, and new information about gene coding, this isn't just a hunch; scientists have documented the constancy of personality in the lab as well. Particularly in the last decade, research has proven that in every human being, genes and brain chemicals influence temperament, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes.

One of the most hopeful by-products of this latest research is that it has cut down on parent-blaming—a once-fashionable psychology. But let's be careful not to swing totally in the other direction. That is, let's not allow ourselves to think that parents don't matter at all. We do. (Otherwise why would I share *my* ideas for being the best parent you can be?)

It's Nature *and* Nurture

"The studies [of twins and adopted children] have important practical implications. Since parenting and other environmental influences can moderate the development of inherited tendencies in children, efforts to assist parents and other care givers to sensitively read a child's behavioral tendencies and to create a supportive context for the child are worthwhile. A good fit between environmental condition and the child's characteristics is reflected, for example, in family routines that provide many opportunities for rambunctious play for highly active children, or in child care settings with quiet niches for shy children to take a break from intensive peer activity.

Thoughtfully designed care giving routines can incorporate helpful buffers against the development of behavior problems among children with inherited vulnerabilities by providing opportunities for choice, relational warmth, structured routine, and other assists.”

—from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Indeed, the most current thinking about the nature/nurture debate describes the phenomenon as a dynamic, ongoing process. It's not nature *versus* nurture. Rather, it's “nature *through* nurture,” according to a recent review of the research (see box). Scientists know this from analyzing countless studies of identical twins as well as research on adopted children, whose biology is different from their parents. Both types of cases demonstrate the complexity of the nature/nurture interplay.

Twins, for example, who have the same chromosomal makeup *and* the same parental influences, don't necessarily turn out the same way. And when scientists look at adopted children whose biological parents are alcoholics or have some type of mental illness, they find that in some cases a nurturing environment (created by their adoptive parents) provides immunity from the genetic predisposition. In other cases, though, even the best parenting can't override heredity.

The bottom line is that no one knows exactly how nature and nurture work, but we do know that they work *together*, each influencing the other. Hence, we have to respect the

child Nature has given us, and at the same time, give that child whatever support he or she needs. Admittedly, this is a delicate balance, especially for parents of toddlers. But following are some important ideas to keep in mind.

You first need to understand—and accept—the child you have. The starting point of being a good parent is to know your own child. In my first book, I explained that the infants I meet generally fall into one of five broad temperamental types, which I call *Angel*, *Textbook*, *Touchy*, *Spirited*, and *Grumpy*. In the next sections of this chapter, we'll look at how these types translate into toddlerhood, and you'll find a questionnaire ([see here](#)) that will help you figure out the type of child you have. What are her talents? What gives her trouble? Is she a child who needs a little extra encouragement or a little extra self-control? Does she plunge willingly into new situations? Recklessly? Or not at all? You must observe your child impartially and answer such questions honestly.

If you base your replies on the reality of who your child is, not on whom you'd like her to be, you will be giving her what I think every parent owes their child: respect. The idea is to look at your toddler, love her for who she is, and tailor your own ideas and behavior to do what is best for her.

Think of it: You wouldn't ever dream of asking an adult who hates sports to join you at a rugby game. You probably wouldn't ask a blind person to join you on a bird-watching expedition. In the same way, if you know your child's temperament, her strengths, her weaknesses, you'll be better able to determine not only what's right for her, but what she enjoys. You'll be able to guide her, provide an environment suited to her, and give her the strategies she needs to cope with the ever more challenging demands of childhood.

You can help your child make the most of whoever he is. It is well documented that biology is not a life sentence. All humans—and even other animals (see box)—are a product of *both* their biology *and* the world into which they're born. One child may be “born shy,” because she inherits a gene that gives her a low threshold for the unfamiliar, but her parents can help her feel safe and teach her strategies for overcoming her shyness. Another child might be “a natural risk taker” because of his serotonin levels, but his parents can help him learn impulse control. In sum, understanding your child's temperament enables you to plan ahead.

Suomi's Monkeys: Biology Is *Not* Destiny

Stephen Suomi and a team of researchers at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development purposely bred a group of rhesus monkeys to be “impulsive.” In the monkeys, as in humans, a lack of control and high risk taking is associated with low levels of the brain chemical serotonin (which inhibits impulsiveness). It seems that a recently identified serotonin-transporter gene (found in humans as well) prevents serotonin from metabolizing efficiently. Suomi found that when monkeys who lacked this gene were raised by average mothers, they tended to get into trouble and end up at the bottom of the social hierarchy. But when they are assigned to mothers known to be exceptionally nurturing, their futures are far brighter. Not only do the monkeys learn to avoid stressful situations or to get help dealing with them (which, not surprisingly, raises their social status in the colony), the extra nurturing actually brings the baby monkeys' serotonin metabolism into normal range. “Virtually all of the outcomes can be altered substantially by early experiences,” says Suomi. “Biology just provides a different set of probabilities.”

—adapted from “A Sense of Health,” *Newsweek*, Fall/Winter 2000.

Your child's needs aside, you must take responsibility for what you do, too. On the stage of life, you are your child's first acting coach and director, and what you do to and for her will shape her as much as her DNA does. In my first book, I reminded parents that everything they do teaches their babies what to expect from them and from the world. Take a toddler who whines constantly. When I meet such a child, I don't think he's being willful or spiteful. He's just doing what his parents taught him.

How did it happen? Every time their little boy whined, they stopped their adult conversation, picked him up, or started playing with him. Mum and Dad truly believed they were being “responsive,” but they didn't realize the lesson their child was learning: *Oh I get it. Whining is a surefire way to get my parents' attention.* This phenomenon, which I call *accidental parenting* (more about it on [here](#) and in [Chapter 8](#)), can begin in infancy and continue into early childhood, unless parents are aware of the impact of their own behavior. And believe me, the consequences are increasingly serious, because toddlers quickly become proficient at manipulating their parents.

Your perspective about your child's nature can determine how well you deal with it. Of course, some children are more difficult than others, and it's also a well-documented fact that a child's personality can influence a parent's actions and reactions. Most people find it easier to be even-tempered around a child who is malleable and cooperative than around a child who's a bit more impetuous or demanding. Still, perspective means everything. One mother might respond to her headstrong daughter by saying, “She's incorrigible,” while another might see the same nature as a good thing—a child who knows her own

mind. It will be easier for the second mum to help her daughter channel her aggressive tendencies toward more suitable applications—for example, leadership. Likewise, one father may be very upset to realize his son is “shy,” while another sees the same reticence as a positive trait—a child who weighs every situation carefully. The second father is more likely to be patient rather than push his son as the first probably would—a strategy that would only make his boy even more fearful (examples of this can be found on [here](#) and [here](#)).

Who Is *Your* Toddler?

In a way, temperament is an even greater consideration in toddlerhood, both because your child is now truly growing into his personality and because this is a time when every day presents new challenges to your child. Temperament determines your child’s ability to handle unfamiliar tasks and circumstances, her “firsts.” You may have already determined what type of baby your toddler was—an *Angel*, *Textbook*, *Touchy*, *Spirited*, or *Grumpy* child. If so, the following questionnaire will only confirm your perception. That means that you started tuning in to your child *early*—and that you’ve been telling yourself the truth about her personality.

Get two clean pieces of paper, and working independently, both you *and* your partner should reply to the questionnaire below. If you’re a single parent, ask the help of another caretaker, the child’s grandparents, or a good friend who knows your toddler well. That way, you at least have another pair of eyes and can compare notes. No two people see the same child exactly the same way, nor does any child act the same way with two different people.

There are no right or wrong answers here—this is a fact-finding exercise, so don’t argue if your answers are