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# Top Tips from the Baby Whisperer for Toddlers

Tracy Hogg with Melinda Blau

# **Top Tips from the Baby Whisperer for Toddlers**

Secrets to Raising Happy  
and Cooperative Toddlers

**Tracy Hogg**  
with Melinda Blau

**Vermilion**  
LONDON

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# Introduction

## **The Challenge of Toddlerhood**

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.

## **Baby Whispering: The Foundation of Good Parenting**

Having cared for over 5,000 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.

If you have already read *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer*, 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.

## **Every child deserves respect - and must learn to respect others as well**

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.

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 comes into the world. 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 her life predictability and safety**

As parents and caretakers, we provide consistency and safety through ritual, routines and rules. 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.

## **My Intentions: The Road to Harmony**

I've outlined below a list of more specific goals which will encourage, teach, and demonstrate through example, how to:

- *View – and respect – your toddler as an individual.* Rather than categorising him by age, allow him to be who he is.
- *Cheer your toddler on towards 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.
- *Learn how to tune in to your child's verbal and nonverbal language.* 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.* One of the biggest challenges of parenting a toddler is that just when you get used to a certain kind of behaviour or a particular level of competence – bam! – your child changes.
- *Promote your child's development and family harmony.* 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.

- *Help your toddler manage her emotions - particularly her frustrations.* Studies have shown that children as young as 14 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. It is important to remember that emotional skills can be learned and as your toddler's emotional repertoire expands there will be a growing awareness of herself and of social situations.
- *Develop a strong meaningful bond between Dad and your toddler.* 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.* As your toddler marches towards 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.
- *Nourish your own adult relationships.* Toddlerhood deprives mums of downtime. You need to learn how to spend guilt-free time away from your toddler.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Your Toddler

When considering the delicate balance of nature/nurture I think 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 idea is to look at your toddler, love her for who she is, and tailor your own ideas and behaviour to do what is best for her.

### **You can help your child make the most of whoever he is**

Understanding your child's temperament enables you to plan ahead.

### **Your child's needs aside, you must take responsibility for what you do, too**

Parents need to be aware of the impact of their own behaviour. 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; still perspective means everything.

## **Who Is Your Toddler?**

Temperament determines your child's ability to handle unfamiliar tasks and circumstances, her 'firsts'. So, to understand your toddler I have devised a test to help guide your decisions.

Get two clean pieces of paper and, working independently, both you and your partner should reply to the questionnaire opposite.

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 different. Simply allow for a broader view. The goal is to help you understand your toddler's make-up.

Keep in mind that this is just an exercise to help you tune in and become more observant about your child's natural inclinations. Mark the answers that reflect your toddler's most typical behaviour - the way she usually acts or reacts.

1. As a baby, my child

A. rarely cried

- B. cried only when she was hungry, tired or overstimulated
  - C. often cried for no apparent reason
  - D. cried very loudly, and if I didn't attend to her, it quickly turned into a rage cry
  - E. cried angrily, usually when we veered from our usual routine or from what she expected
2. When he wakes up in the morning, my toddler
- A. rarely cries – he plays in his cot until I come in
  - B. coos and looks around until he gets bored
  - C. needs immediate attention, or he starts crying
  - D. screams for me to come in
  - E. whimpers to let me know he's up
3. Thinking back to her first bath, I remember that my child
- A. took to the water like a duck
  - B. was a little surprised at the sensation but liked it almost immediately
  - C. was very sensitive, she shook a little and seemed afraid
  - D. was wild-flailing about and splashing
  - E. hated it and cried
4. My child's body language has been typically
- A. relaxed almost always, even as a baby
  - B. relaxed most of the time, even as a baby
  - C. tense and very reactive to external stimuli
  - D. jerky – as a baby, his arms and legs often flailed all over the place
  - E. rigid – as a baby, his arms and legs were often fairly stiff