

RELATIONSHIP builders



Make a Plan

Think of the most important things you want for your child. Talk about these things with the people who are helping to raise him. Then plan activities that will help your child experience and learn these things. For example, if you want your child to love all kinds of music, think of ways to help your child learn about music. You can sing to your child often. You can play music when you put him to sleep. You can make instruments and pretend to have a band. Perhaps there is a concert in a park you can go to. For another example, if spending time with your family is important, think of ways to involve family in your child's daily routine. Write a letter together to a family member far away. Together with your child, make a family photo album or put family pictures on the refrigerator. If you want your child to be generous to others, think of ways to give to people in need. For example, you can make a meal for a friend who is sick, or help pick up an elderly neighbor's yard. Remember to talk with your child about what you are doing and why.

When your child gets to experience something, it will stick with him longer than just talking about it. Giving your child these experiences will help him value them, and know that learning can be fun and help him feel good.



A Personal Picture Book

Staple several pieces of paper together, or use a scrapbook album to create a picture book made just for your toddler. Or find a sturdy piece of cardboard to make a picture-board. Find or take pictures of your family, grandparents, friends, pets or favorite toys. You can also cut out pictures of toys, places, or things your child knows and likes from magazines or catalogues. Tape or glue the pictures to the album you have made. Put a picture of your child on the front with her name, "Grace's Book." Then, read through the book with your toddler, naming each picture and asking questions,

Look, here is a cat.

What does a cat say? Meow.

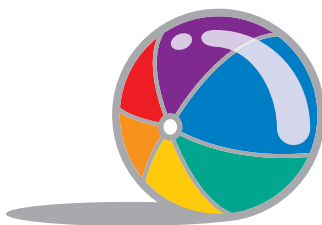
Who is this? It's grandma on her bicycle.

What is on her head?

She's wearing a helmet!

You can also write the name of the object or person on each page. Your child will probably want to look at this book over and over and tell the "story."

Making your toddler her own special book will make her feel loved and special. Looking at the book together will help her learn about words, reading and writing.



Here's What We Did Today

At night as you put your child to bed, talk with him about all the activities you did that day. Give as much detail as you can. If you spent a lot of time apart, try to learn a few things your child did that day so you can recount them together. Start with the morning:

This morning we woke up early and had some cereal with milk for breakfast. Mommy had coffee too. Then, we got dressed for the day. You wore shorts and a t-shirt, and I wore a skirt and a shirt. We both wore shoes.

Continue this kind of "story-telling" for the day, ending with bedtime.

Now we are going to bed. You are in your green pajamas and have your favorite blanket. We did a lot today!

If he wants, let your toddler join in the conversation. If he talks about pretend activities that didn't really happen, that's okay, he's building his imagination!

This is a great way to build your child's language, and also lets him know that what he did that day was important and you love to have him tell you about his day.



I'm Happy, I'm Sad

Take several pictures of the people in your family with expressions on their faces. For example, take pictures of Grandma looking happy, sad, and surprised. Take pictures of Mommy laughing, angry, and puzzled. Or, look through magazines and cut out pictures of people with these common expressions on their faces. Glue the pictures to pieces of paper stapled together to make a book, or put them in an inexpensive photo album. You can also use a family photo album that you already have. Sit with your child on your lap and talk together about the pictures. Ask, **What is grandma feeling in this picture? That's right, she is surprised!** Or, **Can you find the picture of Daddy being silly? That's right, he's laughing in that picture.**

Your child is learning about emotions and the words that describe them.



Happy, Sad, Surprised

Stand with your child in front of a mirror, or give your child a mirror to look at herself. Let your child see you make an expression with your face and body like, **I'm happy, I'm sad and crying, I'm angry, You surprised me! This tastes sour! That's so funny, I can't stop laughing!** When you make the expression, talk about what feeling you are pretending to have. Encourage your child to copy your expression, and talk about these pretend feelings. For example, **Your face tells me you are happy! Oh, now you are sad.** As your child gets older, have her guess what feeling you are pretending to have. Then guess what feelings she is pretending to have. Don't forget to put the mirror away when you're not with your child since mirrors can be dangerous.

When a real-life event happens and your child is feeling an emotion like sadness or happiness, use the words to describe these feelings. For example, **You are very happy about going to the park, aren't you?** Or, **I can see you are sad that Daddy had to go bye-bye.**

Learning the words for emotions and relating them to real life experiences helps your child understand emotions and feelings.



A Story About You

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ake up a story about your child, using her name as often as you can. Have good things happen to your child in this make-believe story. For example:

Once upon a time there was a girl named Roberta. Roberta loved dogs. Every time Roberta saw a dog, she wanted to pet it.

One day Roberta went on a walk with her mommy and she met a new dog. This dog was a special dog – it was a magic dog, because it could talk!

The dog said, Roberta, you are so nice to all the dogs in the neighborhood. We are going to have a special party just for you. Tomorrow come to the park and we will all be there.

So the next day Roberta went to the park and all the dogs came to play with her.

Using your child's name over and over in a positive way helps your child feel good about herself.





I Love Your ...



hen you have a few minutes to give special attention to your child, ask:

**Do you want to know
what I love about you?**

Then start at the top of her head and work your way down, gently touching her and telling her you love every part of her. For example:

**I love your hair. I love your
pretty brown eyes. I love your
nose. I love your chin. I love
your shoulders. I love your arms.**

And so on. As you say the part of her body, touch her gently on that part. Only touch her where she is comfortable with your touch.

When you touch her gently and tell her you love her, she is learning that she is loved and how to love herself which is important for her self-confidence. And she is learning the parts of her body, too!



Speak to the Future

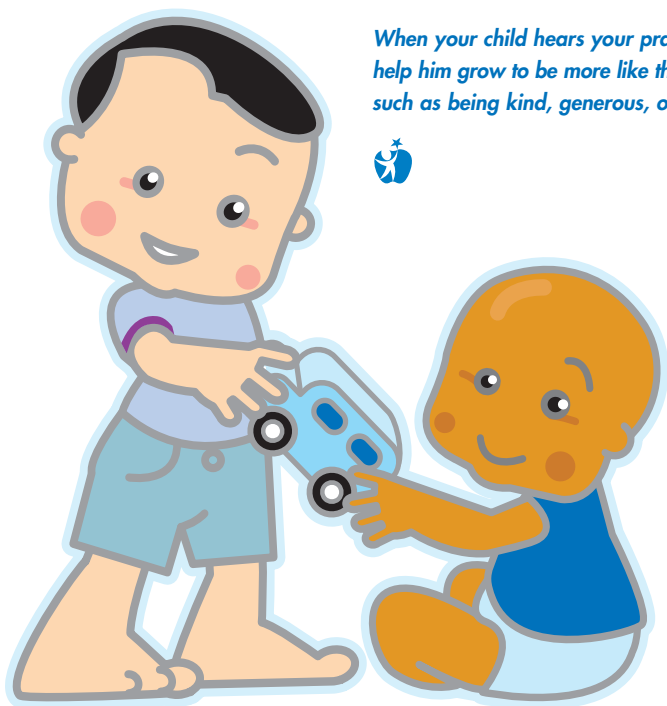
Think of a quality that you want your child to have, like being kind or being generous and sharing. Keep that quality in mind, and when you see your child doing this action – even in the smallest way, praise him for it. Your child may not start out doing this action very often. But if you encourage the quality you like, he will want to do it more. For example, if you see your child caring for another child who is sad, say:

You are very kind, Johnny.

I saw you comforting Nicholas.

You were kind to Nicholas.

When your child hears your praise, it will help him grow to be more like that quality – such as being kind, generous, or friendly.



Who Am I?

Save old clothes of yours and other family members, and let your toddler “be” you. Or think of different types of “workers” he could be, like a teacher, a doctor, a gardener. Help him dress up and walk in shoes that are big for him. Find objects he can use as part of this pretend play. For example, find things he can use for gardening tools to be someone who works outside. Or cooking tools for a baker, or a bag with “junk mail” and pretend mailboxes to be the mail carrier. As he dresses up, ask him lots of questions, like:

What does he want to dress up as?

What does he do at work?

What would he say?

Be part of the pretend play, helping to garden or bake, or getting mail. If he is dressing up as you, then you can pretend to be him!

Your child learns about other people's thoughts and feelings by pretending to be them – doing their job, and having their position in the family.



Important Routines

Routines are important for your two year old! Make a habit of doing some things the same every day. This may be easier than it sounds. Think of the things you do each day that are the same. Does your child get up about the same time each morning? Perhaps you can use the same greeting when you see her first thing in the morning. Do you take the same route each morning? Do you sit at the table for breakfast or lunch each day? Do you read together before bedtime, or give everyone good night kisses? Do you have a routine for putting on pajamas or saying good night? Whatever you think of, make a point of talking with your child about the routine as you are doing it. If you don't have many routines, start making some! They can be as simple as a good morning greeting, eating at the same spot, or a goodnight kiss.

Showing your child that her life has routines that happen over and over helps her feel stable and secure in her world.



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