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Understanding your Toddler

Toddlerhood is a time of dramatic change and numerous challenges for both your toddler and you

Characteristics of toddlers

- For children to grow and develop, they need to test boundaries, seek independence and individuality.
- Toddlers are more curious and energetic but still depend on their parents for reassurance and attention.
- Your child may be showing more interest in playing games, especially ones that seem repetitive.
- He/she is more interested in other children but the concept of sharing is only just developing.
- The ability to feed or dress him/herself is increasing, and he/she is starting to let you know their likes and dislikes. A sense of independence is developing and you may start hearing the words 'I can do it myself'.
- You may notice their frustration if they do not achieve a task they set out to do or find it difficult to let you know what they want.

The Parent-Child Relationship

- Children can have a range of feelings and emotions in a short space of time and don't fully understand what they are feeling, (the younger the child, the harder it is for them to know their feelings).
- Your child's self-awareness and independence and ability to control their environment is easily threatened. They may not have the words yet to express their feelings and needs and get frustrated or even angry. Parents that recognise and empathize with their

child's experience can help their child to contain their emotions and impulses.

- With very young children or those unable to talk yet, parents have a more difficult task and need to try to discover such feelings by watching for facial expressions and learning their different cries.
- If a parent is reasonable in what to expect of their child and remains calm, using gentle firmness and providing clear instructions their child is more likely to be cooperative.
- Parents need to set clear limits to keep their child safe and help them feel secure but parents also need to provide guidance to help their child maintain those limits.

Challenging Moments

- Try to understand your child in terms of what your child is feeling and thinking, not in terms of what he/she is doing. Your child's emotions can be intense from being over excited to feelings of anger or disappointment. Negative emotions such as anger or disappointment are real and painful for your child. By responding in a timely fashion with empathy, attention to needs, a hug or a change of activity, the parent helps their child to regulate such emotions. When your child feels heard and understood, in time your child will learn to manage difficult moments on their own.

- Children need to explore and parents need to make changes to ensure it is safe, for example locking cupboards that store poisonous liquids. The parent can be more relaxed when their child has a safe area to explore. Change your child's world rather than trying to change the child.
- To help your child feel special and loved, show them affection and tell them often. This will help your child develop a healthy self-esteem and the confidence to explore and attempt new skills.

Tips To Promote Positive Behaviours

All strategies have their limitations and no single strategy will work every time.

Predictable routines: Creating a predictable and organised home environment helps your child feel secure.

Setting limits and boundaries: Children need clear messages about which behaviours are acceptable and which are not. When discussing house rules with your child talk about what you want them to do rather than focusing on what not to be doing. Examples – walk in the house, use a nice quiet speaking voice instead of do not run, do not shout!

Giving Instructions and Choices: offer two good options for example the blue or the green toy. This promotes a win-win situation for your child who feels good about making a decision and helps to increase their self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

Give clear instructions

Gain the child's attention using eye contact (this may mean getting down closer to their level), remain calm, using gentle firmness and providing clear simple instructions. For example "I would like you to take your shoes off now please".

Modelling desired behaviour

Children are natural copycats and learn by copying behaviour. Children learn how to interact with other people and develop their social skills by watching their parents interact with each other and other people.

Descriptive praise

The key to encouraging desirable behaviour is to give children lots of positive attention and praise when they are behaving appropriately. Parents that describe what they see, hear and feel enable their child to understand what their parent is praising. For example 'I liked the way you were quietly playing when mummy was talking on the phone'.

Rewards

The best reward is the parent's attention and descriptive praise.

Tresillian Day and Residential Services support families experiencing a range of early parenting challenges including:

- Sleep and settling difficulties
- Adjustment to parenthood
 - Breastfeeding
 - Infant nutrition
 - Toddler behaviour
 - Multiple babies
- Emotional and psychological health & wellbeing
 - Postnatal depression and anxiety

For Parenting Support or to Self Refer to a Tresillian Service call:

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