

# Just in Time Parenting



## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PARTY

- Keep food and party games simple. Plan games in which everyone wins or at least gets some kind of prize.
- Three-year-olds aren't very skilled at entertaining themselves, so plan 1½ to 2 hours of structured activity. Alternate quiet activities (such as a story time) with active games (like a balloon chase or beanbag toss).
- Plan a quiet activity (like drawing or a guessing game) just before serving the cake and ice cream. This way, the children aren't overexcited when they eat.
- Children don't always understand that presents are meant for the birthday child, so it's a good idea to have a small party favor wrapped for each child to open.
- Be prepared for the possibility that your child will be overwhelmed by the whole thing. Try to keep your sense of humor if your child bursts into tears or hides in the closet.

## Planning a birthday party?

**Y**our child is old enough to enjoy having friends over for a celebration, but how fancy should a 3-year-old's party be? The basic rule for a young child's birthday party is: Keep it simple. Think about inviting the same number of children as your child's age.

Children at this age can easily become overexcited at their own parties. Too much activity can turn a fun event into a disaster. Sometimes parents try to combine a toddler's party with an adult party. Remember that gives you twice the work to prepare and cleanup. It's also hard to carefully watch toddlers when you are talking to other adults.

# What's it like to be 35 - 36 months old?



## Expect interest in private parts.

Toddlers begin to understand gender when they are around 3 years old. They notice the differences between boys and girls. It is common for them to show each other their genitals or to ask their friends to show theirs.

This is the same curiosity your child has for other things he is learning about. Try not to react with shock if you catch your toddler showing his genitals or looking at a friend's. Reacting harshly can cause your toddler to feel shameful. Instead, calmly tell your toddler that his genitals are private. Help him and his friend move on to a different activity.

Tips for teaching your child about sex:

- Talk with him about his curiosity.
- Explain that boys have penises and girls have vaginas. Use the same tone of voice as you would when explaining other differences in his world — like some people have red hair, some have black hair.
- Get books for toddlers that help teach about these differences.
- If your toddler seems more curious about genitals than other things, tell your toddler's doctor. Sometimes this can be a sign of abuse.

### How I Understand

- I am curious about other people's emotions.
- I know as many as 4 colors.

### How I Talk

- I am speaking more clearly.
- You can understand at least 1/2 of what I say.
- I can have short conversations.

### How I Grow

- I can run easily.
- I can jump forward.
- All my baby teeth are in.
- I can pour cereal in a bowl.
- I can use child sized utensils.
- I can dress myself.

### Some children do things earlier or later than described here.

Most differences are normal. Focus on what your child can do and get excited about each new skill. If you notice that your child is lagging behind in one or more areas for several months, circle the things that your child cannot do. Check the things your child can do. Use this list to talk with your doctor about your child's development.

## A hearing test is an important part of your child's regular medical checkup.

- When a child is under 3 years of age, hearing is tested by observing your child's response to sound and her ability to learn new words.
- When children turn three, they can usually learn how to take hearing screening tests.
- If your child has a hearing test, be patient. He may not understand what to do in order to cooperate fully.

Infants and toddlers frequently have colds that can lead to ear infections. If ear infections are not detected and treated, the toddler may have hearing problems.

- Catching hearing problems early is the key to successful treatment and the prevention of hearing loss. A hearing problem can interfere with the development of normal language and learning.
- Parents can protect their child's hearing by making sure that infections are treated and hearing is regularly tested by their doctors.

## Feed your child a healthy diet.

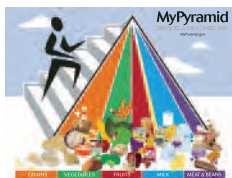
Use the food guide at [www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/index.html](http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/index.html) to plan a balanced diet each day for your toddler. Offer:

- **Fruits** (2-4 servings) and **Vegetables** (3-5 servings)

One of the servings of fruits and vegetables should be high in vitamin C — such as oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes or green peppers. At least every other day, give your child one serving of a food high in vitamin A — such as broccoli, sweet potatoes, carrots, greens, cantaloupe, winter squash, or pumpkin.

*Examples of 1 serving are:*

- 1/3 cup orange juice
- 1/4 baked potato
- 1/4 cup green beans
- 1/4 apple
- 1/4 cup cooked carrots
- 1/4 cup canned peaches
- 1/2 cup lettuce and tomato salad



- **Meat, Poultry, Fish, Beans, or Peanut Butter** (2-3 servings)

*Examples of 1 serving are:*

- 1 egg
- 2 ounces of hamburger
- 1/2 cup beans
- 1 small chicken leg
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter

- **Bread, Tortillas, Cereals, Rice, Macaroni, Spaghetti, Grits, Cornbread, Biscuits** (6-11 servings)

These are made from whole grain or enriched flour or enriched meal.

*Examples of 1 serving are:*

- 1/4 - 1/3 cup oatmeal
- 1/2 slice bread
- 1 piece cornbread
- 1/4 - 1/2 cup dry cereal
- 1 pancake
- 1/2 tortilla
- 1/4 cup rice

- **Milk or Cheese** (4 servings)

Some milk may be in cream soups, custard, pudding, flan, ice cream, or other foods.

*Examples of 1 serving are:*

- 1 slice of cheese
- 1/2 - 3/4 cup milk
- 1/2 cup yogurt
- 3/4 cup cocoa





## Threats and depriving children are abusive.

In this newsletter we have described the best ways to guide children. None of these use physical punishment. Physical punishment does not help children learn to behave.

**Physical punishment** — such as pinching, hitting, spanking, or shaking — can seriously hurt a child. If your child is bruised or injured by physical punishment, this is considered abuse. Depriving a child of food or care, or keeping a child tied up or locked in a room is, of course, abuse. You can also abuse a child with words. Threats of physical or other feared punishment are abuse.

**It is abusive to threaten that scary things** — that the bogeyman will take him, that loved ones will stop loving him or leave him or die — **will happen to the child if he doesn't behave**. It is abusive to make a child believe he is unloved, stupid, wicked, or hopeless. Our suggestions on discipline are written to help parents teach without abuse. Make sure that your babysitters and child care providers are using effective discipline — and not abusive punishment.

Stress management helps parents control their tensions so that they do not take out their anger and frustration on their children. Children who are abused or unfairly or harmfully punished are more likely to become uncooperative and difficult than children who learn the rules and are disciplined more gently and patient-

## Positive guidance produces cooperative and well-behaved children.

- Have a few simple rules, explain them to your child, and stick to them.
- Keep calm when disciplining your child.
- Praise your child's good behavior.
- Tell your child what to do, rather than what not to do.
- Give your child reasonable, limited choices.
- Prepare your child for new situations.
- Save your "no's" for times when your child is in personal danger or is in danger of hurting other people or damaging property.
- Head off problems before they happen. Make it easy for your child to do the right thing.
- Discipline is teaching. It's one of the ways you show you love your child.

# Playing games teaches your child new skills.

## Matching sounds teaches about different sounds.

### You need:

- 6 plastic containers (like margarine tubs or food storage plastic containers)
- Fillings to make the containers rattle — such as rice, beans, coffee grounds, small pebbles

### Getting ready:

- Partly fill two containers with something hard that rattles (like beans). Do not put anything in the containers that will hurt your toddler. Be sure to put the same number of beans in each container so that the containers sound alike when you shake them.
- Then partly fill two more containers with grains of rice. Check to see that they sound the same.
- Partly fill the last two containers with coffee grounds or some other filler. Coffee grounds will make a soft, swishy sound.
- When you shake the three kinds of containers you will discover that each pair sounds different.
- Tape the tops of the containers closed with heavy duty tape to keep your toddler from swallowing the fillings.

### Playing:

- Sit down with your toddler and give her three of the containers — one with each kind of



filling. Keep the other three for yourself.

- Take turns rattling one of the containers and having your toddler find the matching sound in her own set.

### Another way to play this game is to put all six containers between you.

- Pick them up one at a time and shake them. Encourage your toddler to do the same.
- Together, pick up and shake, pick up and shake until you have a sound match for each. Point out that these are the “same” sounds.
- Point out when the sounds are “different.”
- Your child may want to see what is inside the containers making the noise. You can show her, but then be sure the container is

tightly taped again. Put them out of reach when you’re not supervising play with them

## Ask silly questions to encourage your child’s imagination.

- Ask your child to imagine what would happen if something silly occurred — such as what would happen if I put on my glasses upside down, or candy bars grew on trees, or people walked on their hands instead of their feet?
- Let your child make up some silly questions for you, too. Have fun guessing and acting out these silly questions. You might be pleased and surprised with your child’s imagination.

## Have fun with the guessing game.

- Sit in a familiar room with your child, look around and pick out something you can describe in two ways: what it looks like and what it does.
- After giving these two descriptions, ask your child to guess what you are thinking of. For example, I can see something that is red and rolls along the floor — or I can see something that is white and you drink from it — or I see something that has 4 legs and you sit on it.
- Remember to let your child have a turn asking you to guess, too.

## Some playground equipment is not safe.

Your toddler is doing more running, climbing and jumping. He is more independent and used to doing things on his own. He may also try doing things that may not be safe. He likes to try out his new skills and show how “I can do it myself.”

The playground is a great place for your toddler to try out his new skills and get the activity he needs to be healthy. But playgrounds are built for a range of ages. Some things may not be safe for toddlers. Even if the playground is at a school or church, there may be hidden hazards. Point out hazards to your toddler, such as:

- Sharp metal corners or splintered wood
- Bars that your toddler can get his head trapped between
- Large, sharp rocks and tree roots that he can trip over
- Cables that he may trip over
- Hard surfaces

Let him know where he should be careful. Then let him explore. Remind him if you see that he is not playing safely. Always watch your toddler carefully. Know where he is and what he is doing.



## Listening to your child helps him learn to listen.

Sometimes young children feel that instead of listening to them, their parents mostly interrupt, instruct, advise, or criticize. They are often right! This can lead to misunderstanding, stress, and anger. Children whose parents don't listen to them can feel that they and their ideas are not very important.

Check yourself: Do you talk back before you listen? If so, try active listening. Active listening is hearing and understanding the other person without interrupting, jumping to conclusions, judging, preaching, or getting mad. It means showing respect for the other person and her ideas, even if you don't agree with them. It means waiting until others have finished before saying anything. This works with adults, too!

- Focus on your child's interests and encourage him to talk with you — even if you can only spare a few minutes. In talking with your child, you show you care about his thoughts, experiences, and needs, and that you want to learn more about them.

It takes patience and practice to develop good listening skills, but try it. You may find your conversations with your child easier and less stressful. As an extra reward, your child may imitate your good example and start listening more to what you have to say.

## Family meals build strong bonds.

Family meals help to build strong family bonds. You may think you don't have time for family meals, but it's worth the effort. Children who see their parents eating healthy foods also eat healthy foods themselves. Toddlers who eat at least one meal a day with their family do better in school.

Try to have at least one adult sit and eat at the same time as your child every day. Find one time during the week when everyone can sit together. It may be a breakfast or a lunch time. Keep it simple, keep it fun... just keep it!

- Make family meals a priority in your house.
- Plan ahead — look at family schedules. Find a time that works for everyone.
- Let everyone know that the family will sit and eat together.
- Avoid talking about problems.

- Keep meals simple. Buy foods that are easy to prepare.
- Have pleasant family conversations. Talk about fun things.
- Ask your child about her day. Talk about future plans you have together.



### Let children serve themselves.

Three-year-olds can serve themselves most food without help. Letting your child serve herself helps her practice her coordination skills. It may also help her avoid eating too much. Toddlers usually serve themselves the amount of food that is just right for them.

Adults tend to put too much food on toddlers' plates. Toddlers should also be the ones to decide if they want more to eat. Taking seconds of one food without finishing another is okay. Forcing a toddler to eat all the food on her plate can teach her to eat too much.

## Help your child resist negative peer pressure.

Your toddler is off to a good start. You have helped him learn about himself and his surroundings, and you have taught him to trust, respect, and enjoy others.

This foundation has prepared him to become the kind of person you want him to become. The good relationship you have will help you continue to support and guide him, as he faces

future decisions about school, friends, drugs, sex, and other important issues.

- Helping your child think for himself now will help him resist the negative pressures of other teens later on.
- Keeping the lines of communication open now will help him feel he can talk with you about

difficult and confusing questions in the years to come.

- Encouraging your child's enjoyment of language and learning will help him succeed in school.

Parenthood is a rich, exciting opportunity for you to grow with your child. You can offer your child the support, values, and skills to handle whatever comes along in the future.

## By helping, your child is learning to be capable.



Your child is growing more independent and capable every day. She can sort and put away forks and spoons. She can carry piles of clean clothes to the bedroom. She can set the table with silverware.

It takes time and energy for you to show him how to do a new job, but it's worth the effort. Children often say, "Me do it" as they strongly promote their right to become their own person. "Let's do it together" or "I will help too" usually works better than "You can't do that" or "No, I'll do it," or "You're too little."

Encourage your child. It will build her confidence and help her grow into a helpful, responsible person.

## Want to learn more?

For more parenting info and updated links, visit [www.extension.org/parenting](http://www.extension.org/parenting).

If you have questions, contact your local Extension office.

This newsletter gives equal space to both sexes. If he or she is used, we are talking about all children.

*Credits: This newsletter is adapted from Extension Just In Time Parenting newsletters in California, Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Wisconsin.*