

Toddler Age-Related Developmental Milestones

This is a summary of the age-related developmental milestones that my research shows toddlers, aged 18 months to 3 years, go through. These are periods when children fall apart while their brain is growing but are then followed by a dramatic burst of new ability.

Below is a summary chart of the toddler milestones followed by highlights of the irritable period and new ability period for each milestone. Print it out for your own reference, give it as a gift, take it to mom groups, hand out to babysitters and family members. It's not misbehavior: it's growth!

More, including expanded details, activity ideas, non-punitive discipline ideas, and cross-research, can be found in *Misbehavior is Growth: An Observant Parent's Guide to the Toddler Years*, available at all major e-book retailers and at Amazon as a paper copy.

Toddler Developmental Milestones		
No.	Age—At Its Most Irritable	Name
1	18 months, 1 week	Language Comprehension
2	20 months	Strings Objects/Events Together
3	21 months, 3 weeks	Symbolic Thought
4	23 months	Memory Expansion
5	2 years, 1 month	Persistence and Insistence
6	2 years, 2 months	Active Decision Making
7	2 years, 4 months; 2 years, 5 months	Deliberate Rearranging and Creation
8	2 years, 7 months	Sequence of Events (Intellectually)
9	2 years, 8 months	Creative Problem-Solving
10	2 years, 9 months	Mental Picturing
11	2 years, 10 months	Evaluates Right and Wrong
12	2 years, 11 months	Picks a Best Course Among Many

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Thank you for your interest in toddler mental development!

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Toddler Milestone 1 – Language Comprehension

Starts: 18 months

Most Intense: 18 months, 1 week

Ends: 19 Months

Irritable Period Summary

- Clingy
- Occasional Meltdowns
- Sleep schedule becomes erratic, e.g., unreliable nap times

Most Intense Period

- Very clingy with many meltdowns

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

- Explosion in language comprehension
- Follows verbal requests better, e.g., “Please get your bottle”
- Understands and executes the function of an object based solely on a verbal clue, e.g., gets a jacket after the word “jacket” is said or even more advanced, goes to the blender after “smoothie” is said
- Can answer a question but answers it by pointing to something or getting it
- Beginning symbolic play such as non-verbally pretending to put sunscreen on with a toy and signing to put it on their back or putting their hand to their ear as a “phone” but might not know that it is symbolic/pretend play, rather is mimicry using nearby objects
- Mimicry and pretend play, e.g., pretends they are shopping
- Can follow a sequence where there are two events, e.g., wipes up a mess and then throws the paper towel in the garbage
- More respectful of others, e.g., doesn’t step on their sibling
- Many fine motor skills such as doing puzzles
- More awareness of and interest in body parts

Variable

- Advanced language children (often girls) talk in complete sentences (three or four words). Please do not compare your children negatively to this list! Look for the good in your child.
- An increase in words spoken, about one new word per day
- Understands the idea of counting and may be counting

Toddler Mini-Milestone 1B

Starts: Lasts for one or two days around 19 months, 2 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Cranky
- Out of Sorts
- Wants to be near you
- Nap time changes on and around this day, perhaps being tired later than usual for nap
- Slight fever on this day, with no other symptoms of flu
- Much more likely to become ill however

New Abilities Summary

- Mini-milestones do not list new abilities

Toddler Milestone 2 – Strings Objects/Events Together

Starts: 19 Months, 3 Weeks

Most Intense: 20 Months

Ends: Shortly after 20 Months

Irritable Period Summary

- Sleep problems: please expect naps won't be normal
- Extra crankiness
- Wants to be held and put down over and over
- Wants a lovey to go places with them

Most Intense Period

- A confused child who stumbles when they walk and needs to be near you for an extended period of time, may be in and out of sleep all day, might have baby nightmares, and wakes up from this state scared and confused. May have a mild fever for one day with no other symptoms of flu.

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

- Understands and initiates daily routines, e.g., might initiate turning a TV on if that's what you do in the mornings
- Understands the full routine of something well, e.g., might help you make a cup of coffee in the morning and initiates (and may do) all steps correctly or may put toys away on shelf
- Wants to do routines, for instance, wants to watch you make their bottle or cup of milk, not just be handed it
- May be upset if routines are missed, such as if you skip brushing their teeth one night
- Understands who owns what, such as this is mom's phone and should be with mom
- Purposely takes sibling's favorite animal, blanket, or other lovie
- Might show a sad face or cry with the intent of getting another person to do something for them
- Consistently brings favorite animal, blanket, or lovie with them places
- Follows along with simple, dramatic stories, in which events change, such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Helen Oxenbury and Michael Rosen
- Loves songs with a twist, such as "Pop Goes the Weasel"
- Anticipates a short term future event such as saying "uh oh" when they know that someone is in danger and about to fall

- Gets scared of certain noises, such as thunder, as they better understand the threat it may be to them
- Arranges things to form a very basic pattern, such as in a line or a stack
- Arranges objects as to represent something real, e.g., Mr. Potato Head
- Deliberately tries different solutions to achieve an end goal, such as making two magnets stick or buckling a seatbelt
- Initiates more complex problem solving, such as laying a blanket down to make a “bed” to lie down on
- Connects ideas together such as motioning that the driver says “move on back” based on the knowledge of the child song Wheels on the Bus
- Verbally answers simple questions such as replies with “Ya” and means it or picks what shoes they want or points in the direction they want to go after being asked
- Fantasy play is more consistent, e.g., consistently flies a toy airplane around as a toy airplane
- Closes their eyes in a way in which they can still see you but they don’t think you can see them, such as hiding their eyes with their hand but peaking out through two fingers
- Tries to sing part of song
- Increase in words spoken, mostly nouns and verbs

Variable

- Advanced children may already be speaking in sentences (as listed in TM 1)
- Know 1 or 2 colors
- Understands the idea of counting and may be counting

Toddler Milestone 3A

Starts: 20 months, 2 weeks

Most Intense: 20 months, 3+ weeks until 20 months 4+ weeks

Ends: Bleeds into 3B

Irritable Period Summary

- Note: Not everyone sees this milestone at least not in substantial intensity. If you have the luxury of being highly engaged with them, you are unlikely to see any of the following as the child's needs are already met
- Wants to be in the same room with you always
- Grabs you by the hand and brings you places to do things with them
- Wants to sit in primary caregiver's lap or near primary caregiver often
- Drools a lot, puts hand in mouth
- Jealous of other children
- Takes blanket or lovey everywhere
- Sleep issues: early morning wakings
- Spatially confused, for instance, thinks they are on the floor when they are on the first stair and falls on the next step. Please be careful near pool stairs or at playgrounds
- Absolutely won't forget when they leave something they want behind, e.g., their lovey
- Won't use plates/cups properly but wants to use them in different ways (might carry them to a non dining area or do something playful with them)

Most Intense Period

- Insists on being VERY near you, like in the crook of your neck, can't communicate what they want or seems unable to make up their mind, wants to do everything in some specific way that they can't communicate effectively, sleep disruptions (such as early wakings)

New Abilities Summary

- Sees a challenge they think they can do, which they've never done before, and steps up and does it on their own initiative, such as pulling a very heavy thing that you don't think they can do then does
- Very independent and insists on doing things independently, like getting their own food
- It's as if this is a bridge between TM 2 and TM 3B. In previous milestones, they are mastering the manipulation of things and taking part in routines. At this one, they take a risk to do something they can't do. They also play with objects in a "wrong" way purposefully. This play time may be needed to facilitate the next part of this milestone,

when they are capable of symbolic thought, of using items for something other than their original intended use

Toddler Milestone 3B – Symbolic Thought

Starts: 21 Months, 1 Week

Most Intense: 21 months, 3 weeks

Ends: 22 months or a week (sometimes two) thereafter

Irritable Period Summary

- Clingy at first, asks to be held a lot
- Wants only their primary caregiver
- More intense meltdowns than before
- More willing to be away from you at times but when they do get separation anxiety, it's intense
- Stalls at nap and bedtime, becomes demanding of primary caregiver's time, might skip naps
- Picky, e.g., about what clothes to wear or how to eat food, e.g., wants to eat something straight out of the bag (take note of what you do and see if they are trying to mimic you)
- Wants a lovey

Most Intense Period

- Demanding, picky, may hit or throw, separation anxiety, sleep disturbances, and a noticeable increase in head circumference

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

- Noticeably less clingy
- Less separation anxiety
- A very sunny period occurs around 22 months, 2 weeks
- Understands abstract symbols, such as letters, better
- Concrete to abstract matching games become possible, such as matching a Cinderella doll to a picture of Cinderella
- Symbolic play, in which they use an object to represent something else, such as a Lego to represent a tea cup
- Understands that symbolic play is that and is silly, may prefer real things
- Pretend play, such as pretending to be a dinosaur, pretending to read
- Imaginative play based on real events, such as puts on a play with dolls based on what they've seen others do (perhaps tries to potty train a doll)

- Practical life activities explode: turning lights on and off, buckling seat belts, putting clothes on and such. They are just very aggressive and have fun with trying to do a lot more things
- Figure out how to do something they want, such as turning a bin over to practice getting to a light switch
- Simple conversational flow in how they speak
- Responsive to questions such as saying “I’ll find it” after asking “Where is your pillow?” They may do this non verbally also by finding something, like their shoes, upon hearing that’s what you are doing
- Learns new things quickly based on watching others, for instance, might learn how to sit at a computer and pretend to use a mouse after seeing someone at the library do it or learns how to dip food in sauce after seeing at a restaurant for the first time or picks up on any other thing, such as a new puzzle, quickly
- Attempts a more challenging problem, such as putting an open-ended train track together (the kind that only fits together one way), but might not be able to persist with it until completion
- Can remember about 5 events of what is going to happen for the day (snack, play, lunch, store, home)
- Understands difference in gender
- Better fine motor control such as using a spoon better
- Better ability to regulate their own behavior such as placing the spoon next to their plate when done

Variable

- More complete sentences such as “I kissed mommy.” (Some see this in earlier milestones but you are likely to see an increase anyhow)
- Capable of learning many colors
- Counting becomes refined

Toddler Milestone 4 – Memory Expansion

Starts: 22 Months, 3 weeks

Most Intense: Starts 23 months, 1 week +/- 1 week and lasts a few days

Ends: 23 months, 3 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Starts out with a child who is simply clingy and/or might wake up crying
- Defiant in doing normal routines, such as taking a bath
- Might cry
- Skips naps
- Stalls going to bed (wants to read more books, play with toys, etc.)
- When they wake up from sleep, they often cry
- May become slightly more clumsy or fall easier or run into walls
- Wants only their primary caregiver at certain times
- Demanding of time

Most Intense Period

- All of a sudden one day cries more easily or thrashes around, wants to be held, might seem confused, refuses naps for a few days in a row or other sleep disruptions (might wake up at night), might have a slight fever or get sick easier, and may demand large amount of time from primary caregiver

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

- Learns many words rapidly in a short amount of time
- Increase in memory, such as singing almost an entire song
- Remembers an answer to a question, such as what color something is, without seeing it
- Persists at activities that are more open-ended and require visual discrimination, such as putting a train track set together (the kind that can only fit together one way)
- Initiates conversations
- States opinions
- Uses more complex sentences, with subjects, objects, verbs, and adjectives
- Re-enacts simple stories
- Much more delicate fine motor control, e.g., careful in handling and transferring objects
- Better at puzzles, knobbed cylinders

Toddler Milestone 5 – Persistence and Insistence

Starts: 2 years, 1 week

Most Intense: 2 years, 1 month

Ends: 2 years, 1 month, 1 week

Irritable Period Summary

- There may be a noticeable increase in head circumference at the start of this one
- At first it's a child who might grab your hand and lead you somewhere a lot, want to cuddle, be sad that you left, etc. Then that and possibly:
- Bossy, demanding, and whiny, e.g., mom has to sit on a particular chair or has to change their diaper a very particular way
- Wants things done exactly the same way as days earlier, which may not be possible and may result in a meltdown, e.g., assemble a train track like another person did (and you don't know how they did it)
- Won't nap, stalls at naptime
- Higher propensity to bite (may happen only when they feel trapped such as being held against their will)
- Clumsy (may be from not napping)
- Takes clothes or diaper off (may be a desire to change their diaper on their own, diligent diaper changes may help)
- Wants to push all the things and do all the things

Most Intense Period

- The previously listed behaviors start out somewhat subtly and get increasingly more intense until the most intense period. At its most intense is a very demanding child who wants you almost all waking hours.

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

- Comes back to the same activity day after day and gets better at it each day
- Very persistent at accomplishing a challenge, e.g., a jigsaw puzzle
- Insistent on doing what others are doing, e.g., to do what their older siblings are doing, such as painting with them
- Remembers how something was done from a few days ago
- Very conversational
- Speaks two sentences, e.g., "Hi, Mommy. It's nice to see you."
- Can verbally state emotions

- Notices emotions in others or in characters in a book involving the characters

Toddler Milestone 6 – Deliberate and Intelligent Decision Making

Starts: 2 years, 1 month, 2 weeks

Most Intense: 2 years, 1 month, 3 weeks until 2 years, 2 months, 1 week

Ends: 2 years, 3 months

Irritable Period Summary

- At first, just wants to be held, cuddled, or picked up a lot. Some children show more dramatic behaviors (listed below) and some show much more mild behaviors, such as simply wanting held more or getting sick easier throughout the irritable period. An increase in abilities and head circumference may be noticed regardless of showing only mild irritable behaviors
- Shows disappointment in however they do: maybe dramatic slumped shoulders or full on meltdowns. This milestone really depends on the child. The following are but some behavior you MIGHT see.
- Cries for seemingly no reason
- Asks for help
- Bossy, e.g., about where you are allowed to sit
- Picky and stubborn, e.g., might only wear one style of shirt, won't let you put on their pants (they likely want to pick what pants they wear in this situation), or insist you fill up their cup to a certain level with liquid
- Shows regret over past decisions, e.g., chose one pair of shoes then wants a different one while out
- Plays jokes, e.g., hides things from you on purpose or hides themselves
- Sleep disruptions
- Clumsy
- Show fear (comes on suddenly and over specific things somewhere between 2 years 1 month and 2 years, 3 months)
- Confusion/blending of fake things as real things, such as thinking fake food is real food or something on the TV is real such as a ball that is kicked or hit is behind the TV (more likely near end of milestone)

Most Intense Period

- It varies from a child who just wants to snuggle a lot, gets sick more easily, or who does all of the bossy, stubborn behaviors listed above but more intensely with full meltdowns. This one may dissipate around 2 years, 2 months, 2 weeks or greatly break up but still somewhat continue until 2 years, 3 months

New Abilities Summary

- Noticeable increase in head circumference and change in head shape some time during the milestone (may vary for each child across the whole milestone) and an increase in how long their tongue is
- Understands not just that symbols are symbols but that they have meaning. For instance, may show that they understand that a strawberry on a cup of yogurt means it's strawberry and a blueberry means it's something different. This understanding may be why they are so picky and demanding; they sincerely think different color cups, e.g., a blue versus yellow cup, do different things (and they are sometimes right!)
- Other examples of understanding the meaning of symbols: may ascribe a triangle as meaning mountain
- Further understanding symbols: can for instance understand that the sound of "a" is the first sound in "apple"
- Can intelligently alter their course if one way isn't working, such as looking a different way in a book to look for a picture or uses a different or better word when they see you aren't communicating together well
- Can make a choice after someone asks a question about something that is not part of their normal routine, e.g., on the spot you ask them when they are defiant, "Do you want to walk up the stairs or be carried?" and they make their choice
- Decisive about many things relating to their life, e.g., how their hair is worn, what they play with, or where they sit at the dinner table
- Very deliberate in how they behave. They may see their siblings play rock, paper, scissor and they put their hand in the shape to play or deliberately pretend to be like their sibling and put themselves to bed the way their siblings do
- Very deliberate and particular about what they want, e.g., what movie to watch or how high the liquid in their cup must be filled
- The start of "blending" fantasy and reality. For instance, they might "scrape" some of mommy's face and start "sprinkling" it around. This may be a bridge to the next milestone, in which they are much more highly creative
- Compares many things, e.g., big and small (especially of how they are small compared to a big adult), or loud and quiet
- Loves lining things up big to small
- Loves sorting shapes and colors
- Loves to be asked questions so they can show off their knowledge. Non-verbal children can still do this by pointing
- Initiates conversations and activities a lot more
- Initiate jokes and games with others, such as waiting for you to come in the room then scaring you

- Makes up their own song
- May playfully hit as a way to get their own way
- Increasing attention span (as found in also in Toddler Milestone 5)

Toddler Milestone 7 – Deliberate Rearranging and Creation

Starts: 2 Years, 3 Months, 2 or 3 Weeks

Most Intense: Around 2 years, 4 months and again at 2 years, 5 months

Ends: 2 years, 5 months, 2 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Begins subtly but with a noticeable change in head shape and size
- Drooling
- Then hits very suddenly for many at or slightly before 2 years, 3 months, 3 weeks
- “Rearranges” many things: throws their cup, puts their shirt on inside out, opens your eye lids, wraps themselves in the curtain, throws their stuffed animals around, etc., in a repeated ongoing way
- Extremely clumsy, drops stuff, does very risky things like put their blanket over their head and runs
- Doesn’t want to leave primary caregiver
- Possessive of primary caregiver
- Strong fear of abandonment, such as upset something even gets thrown away in the garbage. Please expect at least one major meltdown about this around or before 2 years, 4 months
- Confusion of fake things as real things, such as thinking fake food is real food, thinking something on the TV is real such as a ball that is kicked or hit on TV is behind the TV, think they can pick up and use a fork as found in a book
- Doesn’t nap
- Bossy, e.g., about diaper changes or where you are allowed to stand
- VERY defiant (to get diaper changed, go down for a nap, etc.)
- At times nothing seems to console them
- Makes many bids for connection throughout the day (put on my socks, take off my socks, watch me play, read a book)
- Playfully lies, such as points to the wrong answer when asked a question
- Major meltdowns
- About one meltdown per day in between the two peaks

Most Intense Period

- There are two peaks at this one. It may be two overlapping milestones. Some see relief in between and others do not. A strong fear of abandonment and confusion of fake and real things around 2 years, 4 months. They might get really mad you threw something away. They also might think the images in books/shirts are real (e.g., try to pick up

and use a picture of a fork). Another intense period at 2 years, 5 months (in which absolutely nothing seems to console them) with less intense behavior in between

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

- At this one they start to build in creative ways. Look at your unique child to see how they build. Below are some examples
- Seems to constantly be thinking of what they can do with their own body next. Can they hop? Wiggle their leg? Be upside down?
- Follows a visual pattern to build something, e.g., tangrams
- Can do jigsaw puzzles, specifically they can see a simple picture that should go together and then does it (that they can know the picture and put it together is between 2 – 12 pieces; they may put larger jigsaw puzzles together by trial and error)
- Pretends to be a favorite character, e.g., Snow White or Thomas the Train
- Wants to be like other family members, such as copying their habits, e.g., drinking from a coffee cup in the morning
- Puts on a play based on a book, may put on for instance a scene from Thomas the Train over and over
- Moves around furniture and items in the house
- Builds elaborately with wooden blocks or other sets on their own in creative ways; uses 10 or 20 or more pieces to do so
- Plays with language; very fluent
- Plays around and gets refined/nuanced at whatever it is they do, for instance, making nuanced facial expressions to make people laugh (this is highly dependent on each unique child)
- You can see children thinking

Toddler Milestone 8 – Inference and Deduction, Sequence of Events

Starts: 2 Years, 6 Months, +/-1 Week

Most Intense: 2 years, 6 months, 2 weeks until 2 years, 7 months

Ends: 2 years, 7 months, 2 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Starts out subtle at first: wants lovey or to cuddle, or may occasionally run up to you for a hug, or trots off occasionally and becomes inconsolable (a lovey may help)
- Noticeable change in head size and shape, several times over the course of the milestone, with more intense behavior following each change in head shape
- A desire to stay up until very late at night, talking
- Deliberately tells mistruths and often, e.g., Mommy is daddy, hides things and says lost them or that the missing item is “stuck”
- Loves to create dramatic little plays where someone or something needs helped or rescued and they do the rescuing
- Very jealous
- Bossy, e.g., about where you are allowed to sit
- Very specific about what shirt or pants to wear, requests that specific pant or shirt, e.g., the one with an airplane, even though you didn’t offer this choice
- Picky about the order of things, such as which sock to put on first, then next, then which shoe, etc.
- Refuses naps (won’t go to the bedroom, runs out of the room, etc.), even though very sleepy
- Defiant ALL day long to get a diaper change, take a nap, etc. This is, for many, a very frustrating milestone
- Wants your attention all day long, to see what they did or to sit with you.
- Loves to be messy and muddy
- Can be very dangerously clumsy, like they get super upset while on a changing table and almost fall over face first
- The irritating behaviors at this one can last all day long. They are very picky about a lot of things—no, THIS for lunch, no make a bottle with tap water not filtered water, no, I want to watch a show, no, Mom, you are not allowed to sit for more than 10 minutes. Sorry in advance.
- More likely to get sick
- Will not want to leave a fun activity, such as being at the playground or a bath

Most Intense Period

- Jealous and bossy about their primary caregiver, may hit or throw to separate primary caregiver from others, may not let primary caregiver move, wants caregiver all day long, gets clumsy and may fall off chairs, changing tables, etc., head first. Be careful when they are simply sitting on a chair even. A really big meltdown can be expected at or slightly after 2 years, 7 months, especially if you try to leave a place

New Abilities Summary

- The new abilities start at the very beginning of the irritable period. After the most intense period, the new abilities get turbo charged.
- In this one they match cause: effect and problems:solutions in an intellectual way. They are also capable of inference: of drawing a plausible conclusion given certain facts. Relying on this mental power related to this inference, they can compare and match past and current events. It is usually a 1:1 match, e.g., a hug to a crying child, a kiss to a boo boo, etc. They can rely on their past experiences and knowledge to apply a solution now and they can think in terms of things that happen across time. In the next milestone, they are more flexible in matching solutions to problems

Inference (and Resulting Imagination):

- Draws a plausible conclusion from facts (inference) like if the garage door opens, they guess “dad is home” or if their brother’s door is closed in the morning, they guess “my brother is sleeping”
- Can come up with a solution of their own, not presented to them, such as they are crying and you ask what can help them, offering maybe a drink or a toy, and they say, unexpectedly, “a kiss”
- May assign human qualities to their stuffed animals such as they are “sad” or told to “stay,” as if the stuffed animal will start to walk
- After the most intense period, their imaginative play becomes more complex: more characters, more plot twists, they execute the actions faster and more reliably
- Can identify themselves as “thinking”

1:1 Matching of problem to solution:

- There is a deductive matching of cause to effect at this one in which simple connections are made such as:
- Uses the word “because,” e.g., “I am not going to cry, because I am happy” This is a sequence of events, as intellectually understood by them, as something they said. I did this, because of this.
- Literally pushes buttons, e.g., pushes a button on a remote and finds it stops a movie and realizes what they did and mischievously laughs

- Beginning concern to solve problems/help others but without technical particulars and mostly emotionally comfort, e.g., a baby is crying and they say, “We need to help the baby!” Or consoles other children with a hug after hearing them cry
- Says “sorry” but only *immediately* after something went wrong
- If they get hurt, you now have to kiss the exact place that they got hurt; if they get dirty they may ask to take a bath
- More deliberate and exact in their fine motor control, e.g., may deliberately place fingers together
- More reliably stable and coordinated in their physical body, e.g., a lot less likely to fall back or on their side in the bath tub
- May want a particular caregiver at nursery

Continuity of Time:

- Understands “yesterday,” “today,” and “tomorrow”
- Understands sequences of events: “First this, then this” such as “I’ll be with you after I finish my drink” and they intently watch, waiting for you to be done
- Understands when they are done or finished with something by maybe saying “I’m finished” or wants to carry the doggie bag out of the restaurant, because they know they are done and that’s what you do or say “bye” at the end of something, every time they leave
- Keeps all the steps in their head as they work towards something. For instance, they insist on keeping the gate to a fence open, because they want to go get a rock in the yard (inside the gate) then go throw it in a pond (outside the gate)
- Uses their knowledge of steps to manipulate the process. For instance, they know they can give their siblings a hug before bedtime so they ask to go give the hug, which is a normal part of the routine to be expected and executed, then dart off to go play
- They know that they are never getting a fun moment back if they leave
- On the other hand, at times, seems more comfortable with separation, as if they understand they will reconvene with something or a person in the future
- More likely to understand instructions or a negotiation such as “We are first going to change your diaper then you can go back to [whatever]” and they understand it and submit to it willingly
- Beginning steps to sounding out letter sounds to read a word (letters in sequence make up a word)
- Loves a story in which something goes wrong in the past and it gets rectified such as a child lost a doll and they go back and get it. Peppa Pig and Paw Patrol are ideal for this

- Remembers past events and wants to talk about them again and again and again and again. A nonverbal child may show they know past events by manipulating the process. For instance, the night before you said “only one book” at night and that made them really upset so tonight they go out of their way to make sure two books are lined up

Applies solutions at correct time and place (beginning understanding of right and wrong):

- This is not that they execute what is asked of them through pressure or punishment, e.g., eat your dinner or else you don’t get cake. This is that they, on their own, apply a right or wrong solution to a life problem in a conscious, deliberate way. Such as:
- May know that when you get to a road you have to stop and look
- Likely shows up very playfully at first. They may get to a road and throw their hands up like “Oh no! A road! Whatever are we going to do!?” Or another playful way is they intentionally say the wrong answer to something, emphasizing that they know they can CHOOSE to be wrong, as applied to life
- Similarly seems to understand that an image that is drawn is just a drawn but does it playfully. If they see a cookie drawn on a paper, they may pretend to eat it, but it’s as if they know that’s wrong and they are doing a joke
- Exaggerates when something goes well maybe saying “Woo hoo!” and when things go poorly such as saying “Oh no!”
- Much more direct in knowing what they want, e.g., may take your hand and lead you directly to the playground down the street. This ability to know what they want and how to get it increases greatly after the most intense period at 2 years, 7 months and they become very confident and fast
- Follows some directions like “Can you take your pants off?”
- More reliably understands rules, e.g., they are unlikely to run into the road at any time now, if, say, on the driveway (It’s a relief, really!)

Toddler Milestone 9 – Creative, Flexible, On-the-Spot Problem Solving

Starts: 2 Years, 7 Months 3 Weeks

Most Intense: 2 years, 8 months 1 week +/- 1 week

Ends: 2 years, 8 months, 2 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Milestones 8 and 9 are so close together as to likely vary and blend for many children as far as when they start. Looking at the behavior is, in my experience, the best indicator to know what milestone you are in. Nine is distinct from eight. Eight is marked by defiance all day long. Nine is marked by confusion and paralysis to solve problems
- Becomes confused and indecisive, whereas not long ago they were confident and certain. They might ask you to take a walk and then can't make up their mind about which way to go.
- Refuses to move to solve a very simple problem, e.g., a toy, cup, or food is a few feet away but the child won't get it but instead will cry for it, as if paralyzed to do it
- Wants to have the toys other children have. I believe this stems from a feeling of indecisiveness over what is the very best toy and seeing a child with a different toy makes them feel the other toy is better
- Shows regret over the solution they originally picked, e.g., agrees that one solution is OK, such as dad can turn the light off, but they have a change of mind (and gets upset) a few seconds or minutes later when they seem to realize what is going on, because they wanted to do it
- Seemingly paralyzed to answer a question, e.g., what movie would you like
- Refuses naps, screams about being left alone
- Keeps stalling at bedtime to do "just one more" thing
- Very particular, e.g., out of their entire wardrobe, insists on wearing a particular shirt, dress, or pants (when it may be in the laundry)
- Jealous if their caregiver gives attention to another child or person. They get jealous even if they are in a different room and you are giving attention to another child
- Tries to separate primary caregiver from anyone or anything else that has the child's attention or who is not the child
- Not as likely to want to be right next to you all day long. However, they hate when you leave the room. If they leave the room on their own, it's fine. If YOU leave, prepare to be attacked. You may have trouble doing the simplest of things, like going to the bathroom or going into another room to look something up on a computer
- Wants you off and on, but now typically wants something specific and then lets you be again

- Drools a lot, puts their hand in their mouth (all 20 of their baby teeth should be in by now)
- Asks to cuddle (some of the behaviors are cute!)

Most Intense Period

- Jealous, demanding, won't let you freely move, in seeming disbelief of what is going on, paralyzed to act, irritated and sad for seeming no reason, needs extra comfort

New Abilities Summary

- Right away starts with an incredible increase in self-awareness. They might all of a sudden be embarrassed to not have clothes on, as if they understand this custom and their deviance from it. They clearly start to understand when they are near their own house after coming home in a vehicle.
- Also starts off with a noticeable increase in attention span, in which they might commit to a craft or other activity for 45 minutes
- Has an increase in imagination. Now they are likely to apply their imagination to themselves for a prolonged time. They may pretend they are a crane for days on end and they pick things up like a crane every time they go to do that
- Can come up with solutions to new problems that arise, e.g., if they notice it is cloudy, they might get an umbrella
- Color objects properly, e.g., Ariel's hair red
- Can match a song to what is going on, e.g., sing "Rain, rain, go away" when it is raining
- Can match an etiquette to a social situation. When Dad comes home, they might show them Mom, as if introductions are taking place. Note: It is not a planned thing yet. It is in the moment that they realize this is a thing.
- Can apply a solution at a particular time. For instance, you said they could do X in the morning and they wake up, realize it is morning, and they can do X. However, you can't yet tell them to do Y at a time (e.g., "tell daddy Y when he gets home"). It's based on what they personally want to do and a seeming in-the-moment recognition of the time.
- Starts to make beginning value judgments like "Butterflies are nice" or "This creation I made is great." This can also be considered the "what is right or wrong?" milestone
- Before they could apply one solution to one problem. Now they can choose a solution from many choices
- Attempts to solve much more complex problems without help, e.g., putting batteries in a remote control
- Likes to challenge themselves with new problems. For instance, they might purposely walk a different way than normal to see if they can find their way home

- Likes complicated problems about 3-D space. Might challenge themselves to fit as many blocks as they can in a particular area, say the bed of a toy dump truck.
- Takes on a complicated challenge such as putting together a Tangram puzzle (will need your help but will be committed to trying to solve it)
- Can correct themselves on the spot better, e.g., they say something wrong and you say it the right way, they say it then the right way
- Can go backwards and forwards in solving problems. They might start to build something and realize they made a mistake a few steps back and go back and fix it
- They talk to themselves as they work through problems, “No, no, that wasn’t right.”
- Builds much more elaborate constructions, such as making Thomas the Train, with a funnel, whistle, and cab, out of blocks or makes very long, elaborate train tracks that get bigger and different every day
- Clever solutions to problems, such as building a bridge over something that has a gap or bump (if building with say train tracks or other materials)
- Make up a play about someone helping someone else
- Says, “I don’t know”

Toddler Milestone 10 – Mental Connections, Imaginative Creations and Solutions

Starts: 2 Years, 8 Months, 3 Weeks

Most Intense: A week shy of 2 years, 9 months until 2 years, 9 months, getting progressively worse in that time, then starts to dissipate

Ends: 2 years, 9 months, 2 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Stalls at bedtime, majorly. Maybe be up until midnight working on their new skills
- Bossy about how routines are executed, e.g., agrees to do something but insist on doing something else first
- Cries easily
- Possessive of primary caregiver
- Demands primary caregiver be near them often, wants to sit on you often, nestles in really close to you, follows you everywhere, demands your attention by grabbing you often
- Blocks people from moving
- All of a sudden demands new foods or drink
- Becomes drooly for a day or two
- More prone to illness

Most Intense Period

- Cries, won't stop an activity without an epic meltdown, may thrash around when you stop them from doing something (say taking their sibling's dinner), drools, highly possessive of primary caregiver, blocks caregiver from moving, may fall asleep unusually early or on you at early hours

New Abilities Summary

- Marked by having much more information in their mind more persistently. They notice patterns in ideas, mentally, hold on to new ideas for a decent amount of time, and come up with NEW solutions to problems or invent new imaginative stories
- Very aware of themselves. They know they are being a bit cheeky or even a bit of a pain and they sort of laugh about it as they go about constantly begging you for your attention
- Can notice a pattern between things even if they aren't immediately in their sight, e.g., while looking at a tomato says it looks like an apple or while looking at the color yellow says it looks like a lemon

- Starts some simple patterning such as lining up objects by color in the pattern green, yellow, blue. May commit to doing this all day, with patterns getting longer and more complex day after day
- Can remember new information for a longer amount of time. Something interesting happened in the morning, say they saw a big boat, and they will tell someone about it in the afternoon. Note: You likely can't tell them to do something for a future event that is several hours away; it's still only if they spontaneously want to
- Follows and commits to verbal instructions better, e.g., "The safe spot is the side walk. Please stand there" and they actually stay there without forgetting they shouldn't or follows instructions in a class better. Said another way: they follow short-term instructions longer
- Impressive increase in imagination, may make up a story about something totally new such as someone at the door "is a monster"
- Make up their own solutions to problems. Say they want to balance a block and they can't, so they put together many blocks on the bottom to build a platform. They might take note about how they are "thinking" about the problem, as they sit, immersed in the problem
- Clever in figuring out how to get their own way, e.g., if they get to use a phone after a bath, they ask to take a bath often
- Negotiate with you on their behalf, e.g., "No the bacon only takes one minute to cook!"
- On occasion, more accepting about doing something based on the logic of something. For instance, they are agreeable to getting their diaper changed because you point out that you don't want them to be dirty
- Sensitive to what you think of them: is the thing they just created good?
- Demonstrate that they do not want to hurt someone else, possibly by verbally stating they don't want someone else to be hurt. They likely don't ACT on behalf of not hurting people yet—this comes later—but they may recognize the hurt of others and they don't want to inflict it
- Ask "Why?" often

Toddler Milestone 11 – Fluid with Principles for Short Term Events and Motion

Starts: 2 Years, 9 Months, 3 Weeks

Most Intense: 2 years, 10 months

Ends: 2 years, 10 months, 2 weeks

Irritable Period Summary

- Whiny
- Possessive of primary caregiver
- In seeming disbelief of what is in front of their eyes, e.g., complain that butter is not on bread when it is
- A large time delay in responding to real events, e.g., after their heads get stuck in a shirt, several seconds after they are no longer stuck, they break out into tears about it
- Want all toys and food for themselves
- Want to stay up late
- Strong desire to do things themselves, resulting in meltdowns if they can't accomplish something
- Extreme, major meltdowns, probably in public
- Bossy to others about their role as they solve a problem they are working on
- May use you as a human "tool," such as making your hand move their toys for them
- Does not handle change well, even immediate change, such as moving a utensil a few inches
- Asks to do something and is upset if it doesn't happen within microseconds
- They understand processes continue on or "go out of sight" now. They might misconstrue this at first. When you brush their hair, they might think their hair will pull out or fly out
- Demands you sit in a very exact spot, and not even inches different
- Meltdowns can last a looong time now, 30+ minutes
- Uncoordinated and clumsy, may drop glass cups, spill liquids while pouring them, seems to love to grab knives by the blade, and such

Most Intense Period

- One or more terrible meltdowns where they seem confused and in disbelief of what is happening and/or where they boss you around a lot. This one can be through the roof tiresome with some children, but not all children. Perhaps highly language-oriented and extroverted children, who have higher social needs, are more demanding.

New Abilities Summary

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- Evaluate courses of action as right or wrong based on time to apply the action, harm done, or what is ideal behavior
- In the last one, they hold on to things mentally and sometimes apply principles at a correct time. In this one, it's as if they took full reins over the process. They are in the driver's seat now, thinking while in motion, making plans, making decisions, and initiating activities. I regard it as a major milestone with how fluid they become.

Very Fluid at Short Term Future Plans

- Fully understand short-term future plans and make their desired roles in those plans known, ask about what the plans are, tell others where they should be in those plans. They very easily handle things up to an hour and pretty well up to a day.
- Understands something like “We can't have candy now,” because it's not a convenient time or place, but, on their own, when it is a more appropriate time to have candy, they ask about it
- Can understand the idea of “Do one more fun thing and then we are going to leave”
- Might make a little date with you like “Mommy, come over here and let's take a nap”
- May recognize “Daddy will be back soon.”
- Can be involved in planning activities, e.g., bedtime routine
- Can be told something like “Show Dad this picture when Dad gets home,” and they remember
- Similarly understands the short term *past*: can talk about the events of the day fluidly

Understands Principles about things in Motion

- Clearly deep in thought while in mid-action, such as when running around and contemplating their next move
- Loves to explore places and know their way around
- Understands that red means stop and green means go
- Tries to do what is right while moving: very careful not to spill a drink. May lecture you to “be careful” with them or others
- Very opinionated on how things should go: admonish others “no taking!”

Initiates Action More Often and is More Fluid in it

- Loves to play Hide and Seek, often as the seeker, initiates the game more often
- Much more fluid in their movement, unlikely to get as seeming lost in what they are doing as in last milestones—really changes dramatically at this one; they are losing their “babyness” big time
- Understands back and forth banter better
- Might play cheeky little games where they resist but they know if you are clever there is little point in resisting

Very Exaggerated in their Likes and Dislikes

- State their strong likes and dislikes
- State what a favorite thing of theirs is
- Likes to exaggerate when things “GROSSSSSS.”
- Loves messy/sensory play
- Love to show you gross things in their mouth
- They get a big kick out of your reaction to smells

Understands When Processes go “Out of Sight”

- Understand something in a process even though it goes out of sight,
- May understand that food goes into your belly (where you can’t see it)
- Notices that tracks are left after a car/train rode through something
- Asks “did you mean?” as they project thoughts about what wasn’t said but what might’ve been said
- Tries to grab things that are too far away, such as the ceiling fan or the moon (probably seen in earlier milestones)

Willing to Cooperate if the Reasoning Makes Sense/Stronger Commitment to Right and Wrong

- More often reliably cooperative if you explain something like “You’re dirty and need a bath”
- Tries their hardest not to spill a drink
- Shows restraint in not hitting, because they understand it hurts
- Says “You’re Welcome” at the right time now
- Very forthcoming with saying “Thank you” and “You’re Welcome”
- Takes strong initiative to help other children, such as if they fell off a bike and sticks with the whole thing, all the way until the child is back up and on the bike again

Growth in Imagination. Makes up New Stories, Imagines Fake Things

- Imagination grows to things not in sight, like ghosts and monsters
- Makes up simple stories like a person at the door “Might be a monster!!”
- Makes up things in their free play like a toy chest needs a “key” to be opened
- Loves to act out and put on plays (a growing skill from the last milestone), often simple stories like The Gingerbread Man
- Can count up to 30

Toddler Milestone 12 – Makes Decisions with Many, Moving Variables

Starts: 2 Years, 11 months

Most Intense: 2 Years, 11 Months

Ends: 2 years, 11 months, 2 weeks. Irritating behavior just shy of 3 is likely Preschool Milestone 1

Irritable Period Summary

- Want a lot of attention
- Whiny
- Meltdowns
- Won't let you leave at bedtime, often up until midnight
- Very disoriented and confused. They may have just had a favorite toy, but they think you put it away and keep asking you to get it, even though it is already out
- Stall at bedtime, might say they have to go potty or say they are hungry (but may or may not eat when you get them food)
- Want to be "in" everything, such as medicine and such that they shouldn't be in
- Want to "help" do everything
- Easily falls off of chairs
- Attached to your leg
- Won't accept "No" as an answer
- Become back-seat drivers, dictating what street they want you to go down
- Plays with picking the wrong tool for a job, e.g., brushes hair with a book

Most Intense Period

- This one hits like a truck. The intense part starts off right away potentially with spills, accidents, clumsiness, clinginess, confusion and/or whining. They also may demand to stay up really late. However, it gets greatly dissipates right away.

New Abilities Summary

Distinctive

Strong element of knowing how to act while moving and with multiple decisions to make in this one

- Understand directions of how to get around, such as how to get around a relatively new place, such as a new restaurant, or how to get somewhere familiar by car
- Can give turn by turn directions to get to the grocery store
- Loves to do understand things with many steps, e.g., how to bake a cake or make a smoothie

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- They like to think about what tool is right for the job when several could work
- Can put on a long play by themselves, e.g., The Gingerbread Man
- Doesn't just understand but is fully committed to following principles, e.g., "Green means Go" or take shoes off when you get in the house
- Admonishes you to "be careful"
- Can use a principle to make a decision, such as might be able to find the word "Hot" on the washing machine because they identify the letter "H"

Superb Emotional Control

- Can easily now say "I'm sorry" and "Thank you" even when they are feeling bashful or uneasy.
- Is much more willing to adhere to requests, even if against their own whim at the time, e.g., please don't get into a pool that you are filling up with water
- Better emotional control, collect themselves after they fall
- Noticeable better control over their body, don't fall as much

Social Skills

- Understands if someone is just joking
- Accepting of "No" as an answer
- Beginning role play such as dressing up as a favorite character or asking who you are pretending to be, which shows the first sign of understanding that you are actually "just pretending." Before they absolutely thought they WERE Snow White or Thomas the Train
- Put on plays of their own design
- Better at playing cooperative games where players take turns

Mental Connections Across Time

- Recalls past events and makes connections such as a character in a book rescued someone just like their dad rescued them in a pool (which happened in the past)
- Reminds you of something you promised earlier
- Understands the context of where they are, e.g., when you pull into a restaurant, they announce how hungry they are—because they know that's what you do here at the restaurant
- Might start to make some more abstract connections, such as some cars are "race cars" while others are not (e.g., a tow truck). I moved most of these skills to Preschool Milestone 1. This could use more study.
- They remember protocol at places. They know for instance how to use the conveyor belt at the grocery store, patiently wait for their items to be rung up

Interested in Small Things

- Interested in small details, such as where tiny mice are in their favorite story or that the smallest speck of dirt from a spill needs cleaned up
- Squint their eyes and points to things or maybe likes to look at things through a tube