



### Toddler Behavior – “I Want What I Want When I Want It!”

Dear parents,

I felt that this is the time of the year to share a little information on the behaviors of toddlers. Why? Because our toddlers have settled in and now exhibit behaviors that may be different from what you see at home. And I want to encourage you that you are doing a good job with your little ones and let you know there are stages of unpleasant behaviors you may see in your toddler that may make you raise your eyebrows. Just look at the picture above. Look at the face of the little boy. I am sure you have seen that face once or twice on your toddler, the teachers have. But do not fret because this is not new to early childhood educators like us for we know these behaviors will be short-lived.

Toddlers are sweet, often misunderstood little ones who use many means to communicate their wants, needs and desires. As adults, we try to decipher their hand signals, grunts and groans, cries, and phrases. We so desire to get into their little heads to see “what’s ticking.” But we must first learn to understand why our toddlers behave, at times, in a way that may not be considered “appropriate behavior.”

At the ages of 2 to 3 years, toddlers are still learning how to navigate outside of their home and in various social settings. Coming to school and separating from their parents is the first big step in this transitional period. Next, they must learn how to adjust to new routines, other adults, and other children. For most, they are no longer the “only child” but are one of a “group” of children. They are learning to share (**Note- toddlers do not share, it’s not in their DNA**). In the toddler world, everything is “**MINE!**” Now, they are in an environment where they have to wait and find something else to work with and they are not happy campers. So, our little darlings start exhibiting behaviors that are not necessarily seen at home or possibly have been seen at home or in another social setting, but sadly sometimes overlooked.

What behaviors, you may ask? Well, some may start hitting, pushing, screaming, and even biting. Oh no, my child does not do this at home, and we do not tolerate those behaviors. Yes, unfortunately, they do, and there are numerous factors that may cause a toddler to resort to one or more of these behaviors. So, let’s look at the most prominent factors:

1. **Lack of language skills:** Between the ages of two (2) and three (3), our toddlers are developing and expanding their vocabulary. They begin with 2 - 3-word phrases and advance to 3 – 4-word phrases. They are trying to have conversations like the adults in their lives but are not able to fully express themselves. Of course, as adults, we try to figure out what is being said. So, we start saying what we “think” the toddler said and then he/she becomes “frustrated.” This frustration may compel the toddler to hit or even bite the adult in their life who does not understand him/her, and they will do the same to another child.
2. **Experimentation:** Toddlers love to experiment. They want to know what will happen “**IF**” they touch the stove, “**IF**” they step in the snow without their shoes, “**IF**” they bite into a lemon and the “**IF**” list goes on... Now, using the “art” of experimentation, the toddler wants to see what will happen “**IF**” they hit, push or bite one of their friends. What the toddler will see is their friend crying or maybe even responding in the same manner. Hopefully, from this experience and the guidance of the adult, the child will learn to feel empathy and start to understand that hitting, biting, and pushing will hurt their friend. So although this is not a welcoming situation it will become a learning experience.
3. **Not enough time to run around:** All toddlers need to run, jump, and play, and sometimes adding a few extra minutes will help to exhaust and calm down the active toddler. When this time is not available, some toddlers will resort to unwelcoming behaviors.
4. **Just plain tired:** As adults, we know how we feel when we are tired. We are sometimes cranky and irritable. We should be able to understand why our toddlers will become irritable when tired and the only way they know how to express their feelings is to hit, scream, tantrum and even bite. Note: this is not the “go to” reason. Sometimes as adults we resort to this factor because it is easier to accept as the main reason, which is not always the case.
5. **Lack of social skills:** Toddlers are just learning how to play. Toddlers at this age are normally engaged in “parallel play.” It may appear as though they are playing with a friend, but if you look closely, they are playing “beside” a friend. Social skills are just beginning to develop and as they begin to learn how to play with a friend, the lack of “sharing ability” kicks in. “I want,” “It’s mine,” “No, have it,” becomes the song of the day and of course the results may be a negative reaction which unfortunately may be hitting, pushing and/or biting.

Now that I have shared the main factors for some negative toddler behavior, let’s look at how to intervene, spot and prevent them from happening.

1. We must first keep in mind that toddlers are extremely fast, and if you turn your head for a “nano second,” the toddler has done something or is touching something you asked them not to do or touch. It is important, as adults, to be prepared to intervene before an incident may occur. This is a hard feat to perform. If you see a toddler playing with a toy and a friend approaches, the adult should move as close as possible without hovering over them

and watch for any sudden moves. I always say that your “Spidey senses” will begin to tingle and innately you will know when and how to insert yourself in their play.

2. If you notice that a toddler is seemingly hitting, pushing, or biting one or two specific children, then it should become evident that the toddler in question is trying to engage the other in play but does not know how. The toddler is not deliberately trying to be mean; he/she is not capable of making an appropriate decision. So, create an activity or game to play with those children and model appropriate play.
3. Do not shame or punish the toddler. It will not help the situation but worsen it. The behavior may have occurred out of frustration or due to the lack of words needed to express him/herself. Allow the child the opportunity to express empathy. Show the toddler that his/her friend is hurt, they are crying, what should we do to make him feel better? Read books about hitting or biting and then talk about the pictures in the book. Our toddlers know more than the credit we give them.

To conclude, toddlers are sweet little children who are trying to learn to navigate the world in which they live. We as adults must remember that they have only been in this world for a little while. As our toddlers learn to communicate their needs, thoughts and wants, they may exhibit behaviors that are not too favorable. But that’s why you place them in social environments such as Bronxville Montessori School with teachers who understand the many behaviors they may display and how to redirect them in a “positive” manner. Please rest assured that these behaviors will be short lived if you continue to give your toddler the opportunity to learn. During these early years, our toddlers are developing cognitively, emotionally, and socially, and learning to be part of a community, so they need our love and **patience**. We must believe that in time that they will make good choices. We at Bronxville Montessori School believe in our toddlers, and I know you do, too!

\*You will find “Tips for Toddlers” on our website [www.bronxvillemontessori.com](http://www.bronxvillemontessori.com)

~Ms. Deborah 😊