

from stroller accessories such as a car-seat adapter, cushioned body supports, and shoulder-strap covers. And be mindful of the weather: Dress your baby similarly to how you would dress yourself, with one additional layer. On cold or rainy days, use a blanket over the straps, a bunting bag or footmuffs, and a weather shield. When putting a thick jacket on your baby, be sure to readjust the stroller's straps so they're not too tight. In warmer weather, you can use a portable fan to prevent your baby from overheating.

● **Keep your baby engaged.**

This is a nice time to sing and talk to your baby, which can also help soothe them. (Research shows that parents' voices have a powerful effect in calming infants.) Another way to offer emotional comfort: Transition your baby to face you, if your stroller allows that option. And as you go for your walk, point things out and ask them questions like, "Do you see the tree?" Even though your baby can't speak yet, listening to others stimulates their language development. Changing the location of your strolls often will also help keep your baby content, letting them experience new sights, smells, and sounds.

Sources: Karen Aronian, Ed.D., parenting and education expert and principal of Aronian Education Design; Parents advisor Ari Brown, M.D., founder of 411 Pediatrics and author of *Expecting 411*, *Baby 411*, and *Toddler 411*; Parents advisor Kimberly Montez, M.D., M.P.H., assistant professor of pediatrics at Wake Forest School of Medicine, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

1-2 YEARS

HOW TO

Be Reasonable With Rules

by TAMEKIA REECE

● **Resist giving too many.**

Now is a good time to get your child started with following basic rules, but don't go overboard. A toddler's job is to be curious and explore everything. And developmentally, they can't comprehend



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a long list of "you can do this; you can't do that." It may seem as if they're testing the limits when they refuse to do something, but they probably can't remember what you've told them.

Prioritize the behavior that is proper and most important to your family, such as no hitting and biting. Your child will be able to better understand other rules once they're a little older.

● **Redirect and praise.**

Paying attention to desired behaviors is much more effective than giving consequences for undesired ones. If your toddler does something that's off-limits, such as trying to leap from the sofa, use a firm but calm tone ("No jumping off the couch"). Sit them down with something that is okay for them to do, like playing with a toy truck. Or head out to the backyard so they're able to run, play, and work off some energy. Then make a big deal about that activity: "You made the truck go fast!" or "Yay, you caught the ball!"

● **Don't let it bother you.**

Your toddler craves your attention, even if it's negative. Overlooking minor misbehaviors (those that aren't dangerous to your child or others) is a good way to actually stop your kid from doing them. So if they kick your seat while you're driving, whine, or throw their crayons on the floor, refrain from engaging with the bad behavior. This teaches them that their actions won't succeed in getting them what they want, and it makes those behaviors less appealing. Remember, what they crave is for you to notice them, so once your

kiddo stops or calms down, return your attention with lots of hugs and lovin'. This helps reinforce that not acting out will get the results they desire.

● **Intervene to keep everyone safe.**

Other behaviors, like hitting and kicking, warrant a stronger consequence. You've got to step in if your child becomes physically aggressive. But try not to yell at your toddler, and don't spank or use other physical punishment. First, remind them of the rule and the consequence if it isn't followed: "No throwing. If you throw the blocks at your sister, she can get hurt. That's why we have to put the blocks away." Then follow through immediately.

● **Be consistent.**

Once you've set a limit and decided to use a particular consequence, whether that's ignoring behavior you want to eliminate or putting a favorite toy in a time-out, stick with it. Inconsistency is confusing for toddlers. If one day you say, "No chasing the dog," and stop your child from playing with Boomer for a short while, try your best to do the same every time your kid starts running after the pup. Sure, that means you'll be doing it quite often, but with your patience and consistency, your toddler will eventually get it.

Sources: Chelsea Weyand, Psy.D., a pediatric psychologist at Akron Children's Hospital, in Ohio; Jason Wichman, M.D., a pediatrician at Pediatric Care Specialists, in Overland Park, Kansas.

3-4 YEARS

HOW TO

Know If Your Child Needs Glasses

by JENNA WIRTH

● **Understand the terminology.**

Like adults, children may need glasses to see clearly because they have what doctors call refractive errors, which include nearsightedness (myopia), farsightedness (hyperopia), or

 Try not to worry if your child needs glasses; they may adapt more easily than you think.

astigmatism, a condition in which the cornea is shaped more like a football than a dome. Children may also require glasses to straighten their eyes if they are misaligned (strabismus) or to alleviate intermittent double vision (diplopia). When young children have significant refractive errors and don't wear glasses, they are likely to have permanent unclear vision (amblyopia) that can no longer be corrected by lenses by age 9. This is because their brain has learned to process blurred images.

● Look for typical signs.

Your toddler won't necessarily be able to tell you they have a vision problem, because they might not realize they have one themselves. Whatever they see seems normal to them. Luckily, there are some red flags to look out for. Your child might sit close to the TV, hold handheld devices very near to their face, or squint when looking at an object in the distance—especially if they're nearsighted. Although this makes images clearer for the moment, continually doing so can give your preschooler tension headaches. Headaches can also be caused by looking very closely at picture books or coloring books—anything that is held too near to the eyes, screens or otherwise. So if your child frequently complains that their head hurts and there are no other symptoms, they could be nearsighted. You also might notice that your child is tilting their head a lot, in order to compensate for an astigmatism or to help keep both eyes aligned.

● See a professional.

Your pediatrician should be checking your child's vision at every well visit. But if your child is displaying eyesight problems that are concerning to you and they're between their annual physicals, schedule an eye exam right away with a pediatric optometrist or a pediatric ophthalmologist. They'll be able to evaluate your child and identify any vision problems your little one has. Try not to worry if your child needs glasses; they may adapt more easily than you think. There are lots of kid-friendly glasses for children with fun colors or favorite cartoon characters. Getting to pick out their own new frames may help kids enjoy wearing glasses more, and you can also feel comfortable knowing that your child is protected and has a better chance of success once they start school.

Sources: William Madigan, M.D., division chief of ophthalmology at Children's National Hospital, in Fairfax, Virginia; Angeline Nguyen, M.D., pediatric ophthalmologist at Children's Hospital Los Angeles; Ken Nischal, M.D., chief of the division of pediatric ophthalmology, at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

5-6 YEARS

HOW TO

Help Your Lefty

by EMILY ELVERU

● Know what your kid's facing.

We live in a right-handed world—only about 10 percent of people are left-handed—and if you're a righty yourself, you might not understand exactly what left-handers need to do to adapt in their daily lives. While your kid might think they're clumsy, they may just be dealing with objects that have a subtle difference in their construction favoring right-handedness.

● Rejigger their spaces.

Small, creative swaps can improve some of the frustrations your kid might experience. For example, computer

mouses are almost always set up on the right side of a computer. While your child might get used to this arrangement, it likely won't feel natural. Help them navigate their work space a bit easier by switching the mouse settings on their device. Set up their desk or craft table with supplies easily accessible on the left side and ample room for their left arm to color, cut, or draw without bumping into anything. At mealtime, seat them with their left side at the end of the table (or at least not next to a right-handed person or a wall). In the bathroom, set a basket of toilet paper on their left side (if your roll is mounted on the right) and ask them which side of the sink they'd prefer to keep the soap on so it's easiest to grab.

● Adapt your teaching methods.

Keep your child's hand dominance in mind when you're going over skills such as getting dressed, writing their name, or tying their shoes. For example, left-handed children usually lead with their left when tying sneakers, so rather than saying, "Copy what I do," you might say, "I make a loop with my right hand first, but you can use your left." Avoid directions that specifically reference "left" or "right" laces. You might try the bunny-ears method instead, or look up shoe-tying songs and games for lefties online.

● Get them the "right" school gear.

Left-handed kids are great at adapting and finding new strategies to get through tasks, but simple things like buying different school supplies can make them feel more comfortable and confident in the classroom. Opt for left-handed scissors, nonspiral-bound notebooks (the metal can be painful for a child to rest their arm on), and tripod pencil grips (these are especially useful for kids just learning to write). A clipboard can also help adapt a desk or keep a single sheet of paper in its place. Then be sure to tell your child's teacher, coaches, babysitters, and other helpers that they're left-handed, and encourage your child to advocate for their lefty needs by coming up with go-to phrases like, "I need left-handed scissors, please" or "Can I sit at the