

Tots In Action: 18-24 Months¹

Millie Ferrer²



Hi! It's me, Chris. I'm back. We survived my 12-18 month stage of development. I learned so much thanks to you. I know it was frustrating for you at times, but it was for me too.

As I enter my 18-24 month stage, my boundless curiosity and need to explore are still there. I am learning what you will let me do and what you won't let me do. Set reasonable limits and prepare a safe environment that encourage me to explore. This will help you not get into the "don't" habit. Tell me more about what I can do instead of what I can't do, "Chris, you can draw on this paper." I will feel more in control, therefore, better about myself.

I still don't have the ability to look at a situation and figure out the effect of my behavior. I act on impulse. Please be sensitive and keep in mind the magic word, "patience." Here are some changes in my development:

Physically



I'm really excited about my newly acquired skills. I love my freedom of motion and movement. I can:

- run without falling too often;
- hop, dance and climb;
- go up and down the stairs holding onto the railing;
- kick a large ball;
- pedal a small tricycle;
- put together a simple puzzle of three or more pieces;
- and take off my clothes, and put some back on occasionally.

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2. Millie Ferrer, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Human Development, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

Cognitively



It is through play that I grow and learn the most about my world. I like to play by myself but I truly enjoy it when you take time to play with me. It makes me feel so important and happy. Here are some things I do:

I . . .

- try to sing with you when you sing to me.
- can scribble and draw a line with your help.
- am curious and interested in learning. This is a lifetime adventure.
- poke, bang, turn, twist, and squeeze any device I get my hands on. I still like to explore and experiment.
- like to pretend I'm cooking, sleeping with my teddy bear, or talking on the phone.
- love picture books. I especially like it when you ask me to point to objects and things. I am delighted when I know the answer.

As my language skills increase, I need you to continue to talk to me about my actions. Also, continue to describe what you are doing as well as thinking or feeling. Please don't correct my speech. Simply repeat what I say, pronouncing the words correctly. This will inspire me to continue trying. In addition, you can elaborate a little on my message. For example if I say "more" you can say "more cheese." Before long, if you're patient and responsive, my pronunciation will improve.

Socially



I'm beginning to realize more each day that I'm my own person, separate from others. I can say my

name and enjoy looking at myself in the mirror. I am constantly struggling with feelings of independence and dependence, pride and shame, confidence and doubt, and fear and power. I need your unconditional love to guide me through this time of confusion. Other social skills I'm conquering are the ability to:

- Understand what's mine and what's yours, however, I still don't like to share much.
- Get along with others, although I want it my way at times. My favorite words are "mine" and "no." I've also learned, "go away" and "I don't like it."
- Be friendly toward others. I get enthusiastic about playing with other children in spite of not being able to play cooperatively. Practice makes perfect!

I've just taken up the strangest habit. I'm attached to a special blanket. I like to twirl the end and rub it against my nose. It brings me comfort. I want to take it everywhere I go. Please let me be. I will eventually out-grow it.

Emotionally

My emotions are still like a roller coaster ride, happy one minute and angry the next. Now and then I show my anger by biting and hitting. Don't overreact, it will probably be short lived. Do however, tell me this behavior is not acceptable as calmly as you can. Try saying, "Biting hurts and we don't hurt others." If I persist, set clearer consequences, "Chris, if you bite or hit, we will go home." Please follow through in what you say.



Other emotions that might be stirring up inside of me are:

- **Bashfulness** -- I might be nervous about new people and situations. Allow me to move at my own pace.

- **Embarrassment** -- my feelings are easily hurt by criticism. Focus on the positive things I do.
- **Fearfulness** -- I might be afraid of the noise of a vacuum cleaner, toilet flushing, thunder and lightning, wind, and a number of animals. Remember, infinite patience.

Parents' Corner



Another six months have flown by and you are more convinced than ever that your child is his * own person. Sometimes you might think you aren't doing a good job of parenting because he isn't behaving like he should. No matter how good you are as a parent, remember your child will misbehave. Children lack adult experience, and they are impulsive in nature. Refrain from putting blame on yourself. This will only add more stress to your life. Concentrate on guiding, encouraging and helping him understand appropriate boundaries. Be a compassionate parent, communicating the necessary rules without yelling or shaming. Recognize that life is difficult for him too and he is in the process of learning new skills. The following are more approaches to consider:

- Whenever possible, ignore undesirable behavior. Many times we can get into the habit of paying more attention to our children when they are misbehaving. Children need to feel they belong and are part of the family. Whenever your child is behaving nicely, praise him. He will soon learn what behaviors are appropriate.
- Be reasonable. Don't expect too much. Try to avoid situations that your toddler is too young to handle, like long shopping trips or long car rides without any toys or snacks. Put yourself in his shoes and try to imagine what it's like to be that age.
- Focus on the positive qualities of your child. Don't compare him to others. All children grow and learn at their own natural pace. Comparisons breed conflict and a deep rooted sense of inadequacy. Treat your child as the special gift he is. Let him know he is your special gift.

Are you taking some time for yourself? Taking care of an 18-24 month old can leave you feeling exhausted, stressed and sometimes nearly in tears. In order to feel refreshed and ready to embrace parenthood again, you need some time for yourself. Recall what we spoke about in the previous issue; don't be afraid to ask for help. Go see a movie, visit a friend, take a long walk or just get away for a few hours. You can't demonstrate feelings of content and well-being if you are not happy with yourself and who you are as a person. All of us need tender loving care!

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*Tots In Action uses "he," "his" or "him" to represent toddlers of both genders to avoid confusion.