

# Parenting Information For Mums & Dads: Toddlers



with you  
**every step**  
of the way

Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464



## Parenting Today

Learning how to care for and nurture your child to become an emotionally strong and capable adult takes commitment, effort, support and some humour. To bring out the best in your child and family, we recommend a parenting approach known as 'responsive parenting'. This involves tuning in to your child's social, emotional and physical needs. You are being a responsive parent when you act promptly and match your actions to what your child is trying to communicate to you.

### What to Expect

- Whether you are parenting in a male-female couple, same-sex couple or single-parent family, there are challenges common to all families.
- Each parent brings their own experiences, values and beliefs about family life and parenting.
- It takes time to become confident in parenting.
- The early relationship you form with your child sets them up for life in terms of brain development and future relationship skills.

### Challenges

- Experiencing challenges in family life and parenting is common. Challenges include:
  - Financial pressures or adjustments.
  - Isolation.
  - Low parenting confidence.
  - Poor sleep.
  - Communication and relationship breakdown between parents.
  - 'Too high' expectations of yourself, child or partner.

### Parenting Tips

- Learn to read your child's verbal and non-verbal cues to respond appropriately to their needs.
- Occasionally you will misread your child's cues; this is normal.
- Discover what kind of family you want to be by defining your goals, beliefs and values.
- Develop family traditions, share responsibilities, and allow for moments of fun.
- Be open to advice, but remember every family is unique. What works for one doesn't always work for another.
- Parenting is about trying your best, not perfection.
- Healthy eating, sunshine, fresh air, time with friends and relaxing is good for everyone.
- Maintain friendships while making new social connections through parenting groups and supports.
- You are starting a new parenting partnership with your partner, so you'll need to negotiate how you're going to parent together as a team.
- Respectful and clear communication is key for couples. (Remember, you are both learning to manage the changes in your life).
- Tell your partner how you are feeling and listen to your partner. It's important to share how you're both feeling.
- Accept help or ask for support when needed.

### Safety

Seek help if:

- You are finding it hard to understand your child's cues.
- You aren't coping with parenting or there is ongoing conflict as you try to co-parent.
- You are finding it difficult to resolve common parenting challenges.



## Feeding

From 12 months of age, toddlers should eat family meals. Offer a range of nutritious foods from the five food groups recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Be guided by your child – don't force them to eat if they aren't hungry and don't withhold healthy food when they are.

### What to Expect

- Many toddlers can be fussy eaters. Factors that can affect your toddler's appetite include: activity levels, sleeping patterns and health.
- As long as your toddler is active, well and eating a variety of healthy foods, there is no cause for concern.
- This is a time of exploration and learning for your toddler, so expect some mess and use surfaces that are easy to clean.

### Challenges

- There may be times your toddler will eat foods and then refuse the same foods the very next day.
- It may take many tries before they will accept new foods.
- It's common for toddlers to throw food, they may be testing your reactions.
- This is a time for experimenting with the feel and smell of food, or what sound it makes when dropped.
- Some toddlers can drag out mealtimes.

### Mealtime Tips

- Let your toddler know ahead of time that the meal will be ready soon.
- Sit down together when eating, preferably at a table with the family. Mealtimes provide an opportunity to be with your child and role model positive eating habits.
- Try to keep mealtimes regular and predictable.
- Make your toddler's evening meal early to avoid being over tired.
- Involve your toddler in preparing their meals.
- Encourage your toddler to taste new foods, offer their favourites in combination with new foods.
- Allow time for your toddler to touch and smell their food.
- Praise your child for trying new foods, eating finger foods, using a spoon or waiting their turn.
- Reduce distractions like television and electronic devices.
- Try to limit their eating time to 30 minutes in order to establish a routine.
- Avoid take away or pre-packaged foods that contain high levels of salt and fat.
- Avoid using sweets or chocolate as rewards.
- Toddler milks are not required.
- Large amounts of milk, juice and cordial will fill them up, affecting their appetite.

### Safety

- Stay with your child at mealtimes.
- Always check the temperature of the food before allowing your child to eat it. You don't want to feed your child something that's too hot.
- Seat your child securely and place food within easy reaching distance.
- Safely store any uneaten food for later if your toddler becomes hungry again.

**You decide what foods,  
your toddler decides how much.**

If you have a feeding question, call Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464



## Understanding Sleep

Quality sleep is important for growth and development, so it's important to assist your toddler in achieving good sleep habits. Responding to your toddler consistently and sensitively can improve sleep quality and duration. Remember – development, temperament, sleep environment, relationship security and physical health all influence your toddler's sleep behaviour.

### What to Expect

- Early wake up times. (Putting them to bed later at night won't normally help – they will wake up feeling tired).
- Sleeping through the night more often. (Disturbed sleeping may still occur).
- Delaying tactics prior to going to bed like wanting a drink, a cuddle or one more story.
- Frequently getting out of bed or asking you to stay with them.
- Your toddler may be afraid of the dark or being alone.
- Some toddlers have night terrors where they scream out and appear awake, but they may still be asleep. Don't try to wake them – help them resettle back to sleep calmly.

### Tired Signs

- Look for tired signs in your toddler such as:
  - Yawning.
  - Grizzling or whining.
  - Clinginess.
  - Clumsiness.
  - Bored with toys.

### Tips for Better Sleep

- Toddlers respond well to routine and predictability. It helps them feel safe and understand what is coming next.
- Give your toddler lots of opportunities to play each day and exposure to natural light (be sun safe).
- It can take time to adjust to a new routine, so be patient, calm and responsive.
- Create routines around sleep time, like a bath, quiet time or reading a book.
- Avoid active games and screen time close to bedtime.
- Let your toddler know when it's almost time for bed.
- Make bedtime about the same time every night.
- A dim night light may help your toddler if they're afraid of the dark.
- Put your toddler in bed calmly, kiss them goodnight and let them know you are just outside.

### Challenges

- The most common challenge is getting your toddler to stay in their bed. These 3 steps can help:
  1. Reassure your toddler by saying, 'It's ok, it's time for sleep' while in the room or sitting on their bed briefly.
  2. Go to the door and once again reassure your toddler.
  3. If your toddler is distressed, offer a cuddle and then once calm, go back to the door and reassure them.
- If your toddler gets out of bed, you will need to take them back to bed every time. Calmly repeat steps 1 to 3 (you may need to repeat several times).
- This can feel frustrating, the more your toddler gets used to this routine the more successful it will be.

### Safety

- When your child outgrows their cot (when their shoulders are higher than the cot sides or they are climbing out), it's time to transition to a bed.
- Add bed rails or cushions on the floor next to the bed while adjusting to the change.



## Routines

Every home is unique which means there's no one-size-fits-all approach to developing routines. What's appropriate for the age of your toddler and what works in your home need to be considered.

### What to Expect

- Anything you do consistently becomes your routine.
- Routines provide structure and predictability, which can make a toddler feel safe and help them to calm and regulate emotions.
- Anything can disrupt a routine from time to time, like holidays or illness. During these times, your toddler may be unsettled and need extra comfort and support.

### Tips for Routine Development

- Set realistic expectations of your children and of yourself and be patient.
- Do the same things every day at similar times.
- Toddlers respond well when they know what is coming next, for example by saying, 'It's almost bath time', or, 'We're going to pack away our toys and have our bath.'
- During the day, you should:
  - Make regular times for snacks and meals.
  - Allow lots of time for play and exploration.
  - Make regular times for naps or quiet play.
  - Spend quality time with your toddler every day.
- When preparing for sleep, you can have:
  - Quiet time.
  - Regular routines, like a bath and reading a book before bed.
  - A regular time for bed (see sleep section for more tips).

### Challenges

- At times your toddler may not want to cooperate. When this occurs, these steps might help:
  - Stop and calmly get down to your toddler's eye level to get their attention.
  - Take time to understand what your toddler needs – offer a hug or help if required.
  - Slow down and be calm to help your toddler transition into the next part of the day.

### Flexible Daily Routine – Following Feed, Play, Sleep Cycle

- Variations may be needed to meet your child's needs

AGE	FEED-PLAY TIME	SLEEP / REST TIME	AVERAGE NUMBER OF SLEEPS & FEEDS
12 - 18 months	3 - 4 hours	1 - 3 hours	1 sleep Family meals
18 - 36 months	5 hours	1 - 2 hours	1 sleep or quiet time Family meals
3 - 5 years	Up for most of the day	Encourage quiet time	13 hours of rest in a 24 hour period Family meals

If you have a question about establishing routines, call Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464



## Development

Being a toddler is an exciting time with so much to learn and explore. It's a time of change as your toddler learns many new skills. Parents and carers have a great influence in the development of their toddler. Remember – each child is unique and will develop at their own pace.

### What to Expect

- Your toddler will develop many new skills as they grow. Some of these include:
  - Language and communication skills – by 3 years old, your toddler may speak 3 to 4 word sentences and be able to follow simple instructions.
  - Gross motor skills – like running, jumping, hopping, climbing, and learning to ride a tricycle or scooter.
  - Problem solving – solving simple puzzles, using push and pull objects and playing with toys with buttons and levers.
  - Social and emotional development – managing their emotions and how to play with others.
  - Fine motor skills – like holding a pencil, painting, using scissors and building with blocks.

### Challenges

- Use of screens. It is recommended children 2 to 5 years old have no more than 1 hour of screen time per day (including television, tablets or smart phones).
- If your toddler is using screens, choose high quality programs and apps that have an educational component and stay with your child to ensure they are cyber safe.

### Tips for Healthy Development

- Children learn through playing and interacting with people. Ensure your toddler has lots of opportunities to play and explore.
- Join in and play with your toddler each day with toys that promote imaginative play, such as blocks, toy animals, cooking sets, cars and trains.
- Play outside.
- Join a playgroup where your toddler can learn to play and share with others.
- Have crayons/pencils/paint for your child.
- Try new activities – practise builds confidence and self-esteem.
- Read to your toddler everyday – this helps with language development.
- Talk to your toddler about what is happening around them. Describing what you see helps with language development.

### Safety

- Always make sure you keep your child's environment safe and monitor screen use.





## Connecting With Your Toddler

As a parent of a toddler, you are on a journey to explore the world through your toddler's eyes. Having a secure relationship is important. You can achieve this by being consistently attentive and sensitive to their needs. As your toddler becomes independent, they will watch and learn from how you react and respond to the world around you.

### What to Expect

- Toddlers have big emotions and express them.
- Toddlers want to be independent.
- Toddlers can be stubborn and want their own way.
- Toddlers' moods can escalate quickly as they learn how to manage emotions.
- Toddlers need your help, but may not always be willing to accept your guidance.
- Toddlers can use the word 'no' even though they mean 'yes'.
- Toddlers can show aggression when they are frustrated or anxious.

### Challenges

- One of the biggest challenges for families is balancing work and family, and finding time to stop and connect with your toddler.
- Toddlers are still developing their communication skills.
- As toddlers' emotions can be big and overwhelming, it can be challenging dealing with these strong feelings.

### Safety

- Always step in and help your toddler if the situation is dangerous or you have any safety concerns.

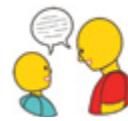
### Tips for Connecting with Your Toddler

- Try to see the world from through your toddler's eyes.
- Find what they do well and comment on it, e.g. 'great building' or 'thank you for sharing'.
- Spend quality time with your toddler – just 5 minutes of concentrated attention per day can make a positive difference to your relationship. (The PRIDE diagram below outlines how this can be most effective).
- Develop strategies to stay calm in challenging situations.
- Keep expectations realistic.
- Always allow plenty of time so you aren't rushing your toddler.

### Building Your Relationship - PRIDE Skills



Praise



Reflection



Imitation



Description



Enjoyment

	Benefits	Example
<b>Praise Behaviour</b>	Increases behaviour you like Brings connection to your relationship Models positive social skills Increases self-esteem	While clapping hands say: 'Great sharing!' 'Beautiful music!' 'Awesome talking!'
<b>Reflect Speech</b>	Shows your child you're paying attention Allows for word pronunciation Increases the chance for your child to add more	Child: 'Ba-ba.' Parent: 'Ba-ba-ball.' Child: 'Lello one.' Parent: 'Yellow block.'
<b>Imitate Play</b>	Gives your approval of child's play Encourages child to model your behaviour Teaches your child how to interact Helps child feel important	Copy their physical movements – child puts arms up, parent puts arms up
<b>Describe Behaviour</b>	Describes your child's body in action Teaches organisation and ideas Increases child's focus on task Slows down an active child	'You're making music.'
<b>Enjoy Time</b>	Providing physical affection adds warmth in the relationship Using animated facial expressions and tone of voice keeps play fun Models positive emotions	Smiling and laughing together, making eye contact and clapping, giving a pat on the back or a hug

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## Behaviour

Your toddler is exploring the world around them full of curiosity and energy, discovering how the world works and where they fit in. It can be a challenging time for parents – but with predictability and consistency, you can enjoy this stage together.

### What to Expect

- Your toddler is learning to regulate their big emotions. They are likely to have tantrums.
- Your toddler is trying to understand the world around them. They push boundaries to test what the rules and limits are.
- Your toddler is learning to be more independent and assertive.
- Your toddler is learning how to play and interact with others.
- Toddlers have shorter attention spans than older children and adults.
- Your toddler can't yet see that their actions have an effect on others.

### Challenges

- It can be hard to manage your toddler's behaviour.
- How you feel can have an impact on your toddler, so it's important to manage stress and take the time to calm yourself and then reconnect with your toddler.
- Toddlers are very responsive to the environment around them. Feeling hungry, tired or unwell can all impact your toddler's mood and behaviour.

### Tips to Manage Behaviour

- Your toddler needs you to be in tune and responsive to their needs in a kind, predictable and consistent way.
- They need boundaries and guidance as they learn about the world.
- When talking to your toddler, get down to their eye level and gain their attention.
- Pay attention to the behaviour you desire, giving labelled praise, e.g. 'Thank you for packing away the toys – great job'.
- Offer clear, simple instructions.
- Divert and distract your toddler from unwanted behaviour.
- Spend time playing and sharing experiences with your toddler – they love being with you.
- Allow opportunities to problem-solve but stay close and offer help if needed.
- Celebrate success, as this builds self-esteem and confidence.
- Talk to your toddler and give them words to describe how they're feeling.
- Try to limit the word 'no' in instructions e.g. 'We play gently with our toys'.
- Ensure your toddler has time to transition from one activity to another. They are more likely to cooperate.
- Be consistent and predictable.

### Safety

- Keep your toddler close and hold hands when out and about.
- If your toddler is having a tantrum, ensure they will not injure themselves from their surroundings.





## Tantrums and Aggression

Some days can be challenging and feel like no matter what you do, your toddler is unhappy. Your toddler may have tantrums or become aggressive (i.e. hitting, kicking or biting). This doesn't mean you are a bad parent or that your child doesn't love you. These are some common behaviours in many toddlers.

### What to Expect

- Toddlers often throw tantrums if they feel you don't understand them.
- Usually there is a trigger to the tantrum or aggressive behaviour.
- Toddlers are not able to regulate or manage their emotions – they are learning.

### Challenges

- It can be difficult as a parent when your toddler is expressing themselves through aggression or tantrums.
- To set you and your child up for success, be prepared for any triggers and avoid taking your child out if they are tired, hungry or unwell.

### Safety

- If your child is having a tantrum, stay close and calm.
- If your toddler is having a tantrum, ensure they will not injure themselves from their surroundings.

### Tips for Tantrums and Aggression

- Try and stay calm when your toddler is having a tantrum or showing aggression.
- Your toddler will learn how to manage difficult situations and their emotions by watching you, so try to be a good role model.
- The CARES diagram below is helpful with challenging situations.

#### Tantrums

- Try to divert and distract your toddler.
- Stay close and stay calm, offering soothing words e.g. 'Daddy's here if you need help'.
- Ensure that your toddler is safe.
- Once the tantrum is over, offer a cuddle (having a tantrum is scary for your toddler).
- Once they're calm, speak about what upset them.
- Use words that describe how they were feeling to encourage their understanding of emotions.

#### Aggression

- Try to divert and distract your toddler.
- Be consistent and always address aggressive behaviour.
- If your toddler is aggressive, calmly get down to their eye level, gently hold their hands and say 'no hurting'.
- Turn away and remove eye contact for 3 seconds.
- Make eye contact again and say 'no hurting, gentle hands'. (Your toddler may then need help to move to a different activity).
- Always praise gentle hands or gentle play.



**C** Come in



**A** Assist



**R** Reassure



**E** Emotional validation



**S** Soothe

**C** – Come in calmly and get close to your child

**A** – Assist your child when they have a problem

**R** – Reassure your toddler and let them know you are there for them

**E** – Emotional validation; talk about the emotion they are experiencing

**S** – Soothe your toddler with your voice and touch

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## Mum and Dad Wellbeing

Parenting can be one of the best and also one of the most challenging experiences of your life. Some challenges are common to both parents, but some can be felt differently depending on whether you are mum or dad. Harmony in the home and the quality of your relationship with your child and partner is important to the health and wellbeing of the whole family.

### Mum Challenges

- The expectation to be the perfect mum/super mum.
- It is normal to feel a loss of who you 'used' to be. Being 'mum' can feel different to your identity, which could have been attached to your career or independence.
- Taking leave from your career when you have a child is a big decision. It is common to feel conflicted about this.
- While things are changing, it is still largely women who are at home looking after the child and it can feel like there is an expectation to be doing it all.
- Around 1 in 5 mums experience anxiety and/or depression.

### Dad Challenges

- Many dads struggle with how to be a role model when they themselves may not have a role model to follow. Times have changed and so has the role of dads. This is a good thing, but it is uncharted territory for many.
- Some dads think their partners are better at child duties, but largely this is because they have more opportunity to practise these skills.
- Struggling to get the balance between career and family is common.
- Sometimes it feels like your relationship is coming last and caring for your child takes over everything.
- Around 1 in 10 dads experience anxiety and/or depression.

### Tips for Mum

- Adjusting to parenting takes time, even for mums. It is normal not to know exactly what your child needs all of the time.
- Being a perfect mum is an unrealistic expectation. Don't believe everything you see on social media. Every mum and every family faces challenges.
- Identify what was important to you before you had children and find a way to include that in your life.
- Looking after yourself is important. When you care for yourself you are better able to care for others.
- Discuss your plans for returning to work with your partner and employer. It's OK if you want to return to work, but it's also OK if you change your mind. Plans can change.
- Accept help from others, especially your partner. Accept they might do things a bit differently and that's OK.
- Be specific about what you need from your partner. Respectful communication is important.
- Seeking help early is important and forms part of managing problems successfully.

### Tips for Dad

- Learning any new skill takes time. You don't have to be perfect, just give it a go.
- Get involved with your child's routine. Be a team with your partner and embrace that each of you will handle your child differently.
- Times are changing, so choose parental leave that is right for your family. More dads are taking extended leave to be the dad they want to be. Be brave, even if you are the first in your workplace.
- Take time to connect every day and spend time with your child. Never underestimate the power of a smile and a cuddle.
- Check in with your partner. Be specific and ask questions about what is going to be helpful.
- Quality time as a couple is important to stay connected. Discuss what quality time means to both of you. Don't assume a romantic dinner is the magic fix.
- Looking after yourself is important. When you're happier you're better able to support your partner and your child. Look out for Dads' Groups in your area.

### Safety

- Getting support that you or a family member needs is a sign of great strength. Support networks exist as a way to promote the health and wellbeing of the entire family.

If you have a parenting question, call Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464

## Contact Details

### For all enquiries

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Karitane is a not-for-profit organisation & registered charity committed to supporting families.

### Our Vision

Leaders in early parenting services that empower families and children to be confident, safe & resilient.



**Careline: 1300 227 464**

For regular updates and parenting tips visit  
[www.karitane.com.au](http://www.karitane.com.au)

