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Toddlers: Social & Emotional Development

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Summary

In this program viewers learn where toddlers fall on Erikson's stages of emotional development, the emotional expressions that toddlers go through, and how they develop a sense of self. Also discussed is the nature of the social relationships toddlers make.

Key points:

- Erik Erikson established a series of emotional stages in which two opposite emotions compete.
- Birth to 18 months is a stage called Trust vs. Mistrust, where parents and caregivers can foster trust through consistently using routines that help a toddler know what to expect and feel safe.
- From 18 months to 3 years is the stage called Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, in which children begin to realize that their behavior can affect the outcome of situations and start to assert some independence.
- A critical part of achieving trust and autonomy is a child's ability to form an attachment with his or her primary caregivers.
- Toddlers experience separation anxiety, which shows that they are creating emotional bonds with their primary caregivers.
- Temper tantrums exist, but over time toddlers can learn to handle their emotions more calmly.
- Toddlers' sense of humor is developing during this time, and they are even able to occasionally put aside their own wants and needs and respond empathetically towards others.
- The differences between the social and emotional development among toddlers are based on individual temperaments and personalities, as well as environment and nurturing.
- A child's temperament involves patterns of emotions that are consistent over time and may be affected by the environment in which the child lives.
- The first relationship a child forms is with their parents or guardians, and feeling safe and loved in these relationships helps them form bonds with others such as siblings and family members.
- Eventually, they will play with peers in parallel play; it is also the beginning of establishing friendships.

Stages of Development

Developmental theorist Erik Erikson identified stages of emotional development that individuals go through in their lifetime. In each stage, there is a struggle between two opposite emotions.

The first stage is a struggle between trust and mistrust, beginning at birth and lasting through 18 months. Feeling safe and secure is important to a toddler's emotional development and if caregivers make sure all the child's needs are met, and when the child is provided with love, the child develops a sense of trust.

Consistency is key in developing trust, and one way to establish consistency with toddlers is to establish routines. Toddlers have no concept of time, so the events in each day become the way they learn order. Creating daily routines around such events as waking up, mealtimes, naps, and bedtime will be beneficial to the toddler. Using the same vocabulary during these routines will also help create consistency. Routines and the knowledge of what comes next give the child a sense of security.

Once the toddler feels safe and secure within their environments and relationships, they move toward developing a small amount of independence.

The second of Erikson's stages is Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. This occurs between 18 months and 3 years of age. Autonomy is independence and control over one's life. Asserting their feelings regardless if they get "their way" or not, are the first steps toward autonomy.

Another aspect of autonomy is the toddler's desire to want to do things for themselves. If caregivers build opportunities to make choices into a toddler's day, this can help foster autonomy, as well as provide chances for the child to explore their environment. In this stage of development, toddlers begin to understand that they are a person separate from their caregivers, and learn to build a small amount of independence and a sense of accomplishment.

Attachment is the two-way process through which infants form emotional bonds with another person, particularly a parent. Two components of attachment are: the child's need for protection and comfort; and the primary caregiver's response to these needs. Psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth identified stages of attachment and explored the concept of the parent as a secure base. Securely attached toddlers feel safe exploring their world because they know that they can return to their primary caregiver – their secure base that protects them.

Emotions

For many young children, parting from their caregivers is devastating. Separation anxiety is the distress felt by children when their usual caregiver departs. This anxiety usually begins about 7 or 8 months and peaks about 14 months, but can continue through the second year as well. When separation occurs, the frustration of the child often makes for an emotional separation, an indication that the toddler is growing in social and emotional bonds with their primary caregivers. Toddlers may cry, cling to parent, or ignore the attention of whoever is going to take care of them in the caregiver's absence to express separation anxiety.

Strategies to ease a separation anxiety situation:

- Use a beloved object to help the child feel more secure.
- Schedule departures for when a child is less likely to be tired, hungry or restless.
- Create a consistent exit ritual helps the child realize that a separation will occur.

To help a toddler who is experiencing anxiety, engage the child, act as a secure base for the child and stick with the child's established daily routines.

Temper tantrums are another emotion-driven behavior exhibited by toddlers. Tantrums usually erupt in the second year. Temper tantrums are emotional outbursts that are the result of overwhelming frustration with which a child cannot otherwise cope. These often stem from an underlying cause of new people, places, or expectations, as well as over stimulation, or tiredness. A tantrum begins when the child has become overwhelmed by his or her own environment. Supporting and reassuring the child can help them overcome their unmanageable feelings and gradually learn that the uncontrollable can be controlled and frustrations can be tolerated.

An emerging sense of humor is another aspect of a toddler's emotional development. Visual jokes and slapstick humor still entertain, but now that toddlers have a better understanding of language, rhymes, stories, and song lyrics are also good for a laugh. Toddlers can also begin to mimic jokes or even make up their own.

Another emotional response that older toddlers are beginning to develop is empathy. Empathy is an identification with and understanding of another's situation and feelings. At about 24 months, toddlers have been known to show care and concern for others. To show empathy, a toddler needs to be able to read and identify the emotional states of others. They also must be able to sense that their own actions can positively affect the person they are observing.

Personality & Temperament

Personality is the sum total of the characteristics that differentiate one person from another. A child's personality will be affected if they have problems with mistrusting a caregiver, or if shame and doubt overshadow feelings of autonomy. There may also be factors present at birth that play into personality development.

Temperament refers to patterns of emotions that are consistent and enduring characteristics of an individual. Activity level, emotional intensity, frustration tolerance, reaction to new people, and reaction to change are five characteristics that factor into describing a child's temperament.

Goodness-of-fit means that development is affected by the degree of match between a child's temperament and the demands of the environment in which he or she is being raised. Being aware of temperament can help adults anticipate a child's responses to various events and circumstances. This is not to say that a child won't act out of character occasionally or even change these feelings and adapt their behaviors over time.

Relationships

Parent/child relationships set the groundwork for effective social interaction with others, but learning how to respond to others is key to a toddler's social development. Over time, a toddler broadens the group of people with whom they have significant relationships. After the parent or primary caregiver, siblings are usually the first people with whom toddlers develop relationships. Group childcare situations as well as playgroups may help widen their social circle to include non-family members and encourage development of social skills.

Most toddler play is parallel, meaning children often play side by side as opposed to playing games involving give and take or the sharing of toys and ideas. Often toddlers will imitate another child's actions or mimic their sounds or behaviors. Young children do form attachments to their peers, and form the beginnings of friendships.

Ways to help a child develop peer relationships:

- Promote parallel play by providing more than enough toys.
- Keep play sessions short.
- Use the word "friend" when talking about a child's favorite peers.

Review

- Erik Erikson's stage theory places children from birth to 18 months in the Trust vs. Mistrust stage. Within this stage, consistency shown by the primary caregiver helps toddlers feel safe and secure.
- Toddlers ages 18 months to 3 years fall into the stage called Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. Here toddlers begin to assert some independence, and as they make their needs and feelings known, they begin to realize how their behaviors affect others.
- The natural development of toddlers involves a wide range of emotions that includes feelings of separation anxiety, tantrums exhibited when feelings get overwhelming, and an emerging sense of humor, as well as the beginnings of empathy.
- A toddler's personality and temperament affect how they relate to their families, peers, and life situation.
- Early on, children view themselves as the center around which all others revolve, but over time, they learn that other people are separate from them and have their own feelings and ideas, and move from relationships with their parents and caregivers to peer relationships.
- Social and emotional milestones may be more subtle progressions than learning to walk and talk, but are just as important to the development of a healthy child.

Questions For Discussion

1. Where do toddlers fall on Erik Erikson's stages of emotional development?

Toddlers fall into two stages during these years of development. The first being the Trust vs. Mistrust stage, where children birth to 18 months need to be assured that they can trust caregivers through consistently used routines, attention, and love. The second stage that toddlers ages 18 months to 3 years experience is called Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. In this stage, children begin to realize that their behavior can affect the outcome of situations and start to assert some independence.

2. What is a temper tantrum? What are some causes of temper tantrums?

Temper tantrums are an emotion-driven behavior, usually erupting in the second year. They are emotional outbursts that are the result of overwhelming frustration with which a child cannot otherwise cope. Tantrums often stem from an underlying cause of new people, places, or expectations, as well as overstimulation, or tiredness.

3. What is empathy? How do toddlers begin to form this emotional trait?

Empathy is the identification with and understanding of another's situation and feelings. At about 24 months, toddlers have been known to show care and concern for others. But to show empathy, a toddler needs to be able to read and identify the emotional states of others and be able to sense that their own actions can positively affect the person they are with. Ways to foster empathetic feelings in toddlers include: talk to the child about how they feel, talk about why they may feel as they do, and model empathy.

4. What does the concept "Goodness-of-fit" mean? How does it relate to personality and temperament?

This is the concept that development is affected by the degree of match between a child's temperament and the demands of the environment in which they are being raised. Being aware of temperament can help anticipate a child's response to various events and circumstances.

5. What is parallel play? How does this type of play affect relationships of the toddler?

Most toddler play is parallel play, meaning children often play side by side as opposed to playing games involving give and take or the sharing of toys or ideas. Through parallel play children can form attachments to playmates; this type of play can foster the beginnings of friendships. Ways to enhance the peer experiences of a toddler include parallel play, shortened play times, and using the word friend when talking about peers.

Suggested Activities

1. Create some fun, interesting daily routines for a toddler. Create a wake-up routine, a mealtime routine, a naptime routine, or a bedtime routine that will help a toddler form a feeling of consistency and trust with a caregiver. Remember that toddlers want to feel safe, and consistency in routines lets them learn what to expect and develop trust.
2. Role-play with classmates to develop positive ways to help a toddler who is experiencing a temper tantrum. One student should have an emotional outburst and have another be in the role of the caregiver. Find out why the tantrum is occurring, determining what is creating the overwhelming situation, and then have the caregiver provide ways to help the child resolve those frustrations and gain an ability to regulate their feelings.

Research Project

What is separation anxiety and how does it manifest itself in toddlers? Research attachment theory and apply concepts from the theory to a toddler's experience with separation anxiety. What is attachment theory? How does it affect the toddler later in life? What are some examples of different forms of attachment that are rooted in parents' behaviors and how can it affect the child?

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Fill-In-The-Blank

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the bank at the bottom of the page.

Toddlers fall into _____, the first stage of Erikson's theory of development, where they rely heavily on their caregivers. The stage of _____, which usually occurs at the ages of _____ months to 3 years, is when toddlers start to gain a sense of independence. Many children experience _____ when their caregivers depart, which can lead to many _____, or emotional outbursts by the child. The distress felt by the child usually peaks at the age of _____ months. A child's _____ will be affected if they have problems with mistrusting a caregiver, but can also be affected by other factors present at birth. Activity level, emotional intensity, frustration tolerance, reaction to new people, and reaction to change are five characteristics that factor into describing a child's _____. Through the concept of _____, caregivers can start to anticipate a child's reactions to certain situations. _____ is the identification with and understanding of another's situation and feelings, and older toddlers at the age of about _____ months have been known to show care and concern for others. Toddlers can also show care to peers, and through facilitated _____ attachment bonds and friendships can start to form.

Word Bank:

14	empathy	separation anxiety
personality	temper tantrums	goodness-of-fit
Trust vs. Mistrust	24	temperament
parallel play	18	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

Toddlers: Social & Emotional Development

Fill-In-The-Blank *Answer Key*

Toddlers fall into [Trust vs. Mistrust](#), the first stage of Erikson's theory of development, where they rely heavily on their caregivers. The stage of [Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt](#), which usually occurs at the ages of [18](#) months to 3 years, is when toddlers start to gain a sense of independence. Many children experience [separation anxiety](#) when their caregivers depart, which can lead to many [temper tantrums](#), or emotional outbursts by the child. The distress felt by the child usually peaks at the age of [14](#) months. A child's [personality](#) will be affected if they have problems with mistrusting a caregiver, but can also be affected by other factors present at birth. Activity level, emotional intensity, frustration tolerance, reaction to new people, and reaction to change are five characteristics that factor into describing a child's [temperament](#). Through the concept of [goodness-of-fit](#), caregivers can start to anticipate a child's reactions to certain situations. [Empathy](#) is the identification with and understanding of another's situation and feelings, and older toddlers at the age of about [24](#) months have been known to show care and concern for others. Toddlers can also show care to peers, and through facilitated [parallel play](#) attachment bonds and friendships can start to form.

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Multiple Choice

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

- 1) This theorist placed toddlers in two of his eight stages:
 - a) Piaget
 - b) Erikson
 - c) Harlow
 - d) Bowlby
- 2) At about 24 months, toddlers have been known to show this emotional response:
 - a) sympathy
 - b) distress
 - c) love
 - d) empathy
- 3) Temperament can be identified by how many characteristics:
 - a) 3
 - b) 10
 - c) 5
 - d) 15
- 4) This is the concept of how development is affected through the interaction between the child and its environment that its raised in:
 - a) nature vs. nurture
 - b) goodness-of-fit
 - c) personality
 - d) temperament
- 5) A toddler's assertion of independence can be seen in these behaviors:
 - a) dressing
 - b) feeding
 - c) drinking
 - d) all of the above
- 6) This is the emotional outburst of a toddler due to an overwhelming situation:
 - a) separation anxiety
 - b) crying
 - c) temper tantrum
 - d) empathy
- 7) This is the type of play most toddlers engage in:
 - a) parallel
 - b) modeling
 - c) mimicking
 - d) cooperative
- 8) Which of these is a stage a toddler experiences in Erikson's theory:
 - a) Initiative vs. Guilt
 - b) Industry vs. Inferiority
 - c) Trust vs. Mistrust
 - d) Generativity vs. Stagnation
- 9) This emotional response peaks at about 14 months of age:
 - a) temper tantrums
 - b) separation anxiety
 - c) autonomy vs. shame and doubt
 - d) empathy
- 10) This is the sum total of the characteristics that differentiate one person from another:
 - a) temperament
 - b) goodness-of-fit
 - c) traits
 - d) personality

Toddlers: Social & Emotional Development

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- b) goodness-of-fit
- c) traits
- d) personality**

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Matching

Match the words in the first column to the best available answer in the second column.

- | | | |
|-------|---|--------------------------------|
| _____ | In this stage of development toddlers search for independence | 1) temperament |
| _____ | This is the understanding of another's feelings; older toddlers start to gain this emotional response | 2) attachment |
| _____ | The patterns of emotions that are consistent and enduring characteristics of an individual | 3) parallel play |
| _____ | The distress felt by children when their usual caregiver departs | 4) Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt |
| _____ | The sum total of the characteristics that differentiate one person from another | 5) personality |
| _____ | Toddlers often use this form of play to establish peer relationships | 6) separation anxiety |
| _____ | Erik Erikson placed children from birth to 18 months in this stage of development | 7) Trust vs Mistrust |
| _____ | The two-way process through which infants form emotional bonds with another person – particularly a primary caregiver | 8) empathy |

Toddlers: Social & Emotional Development

Matching *Answer Key*

Match the words in the first column to the best available answer in the second column.

**4) Autonomy vs
Shame and Doubt**

In this stage of development toddlers search for independence

8) empathy

This is the understanding of another's feelings; older toddlers start to gain this emotional response

1) temperament

The patterns of emotions that are consistent and enduring characteristics of an individual

**6) separation
anxiety**

The distress felt by children when their usual caregiver departs

5) personality

The sum total of the characteristics that differentiate one person from another

3) parallel play

Toddlers often use this form of play to establish peer relationships

**7) Trust vs
Mistrust**

Erik Erikson placed children from birth to 18 months in this stage of development

2) attachment

The two-way process through which infants form emotional bonds with another person – particularly a primary caregiver

Glossary

Autonomy	Independence and control over one's life
Attachment	The two-way process through which infants form emotional bonds with another person - particularly a primary caregiver
Empathy	An identification with and understanding of another's situation and feelings
Goodness-of-fit	Idea that development is affected by the degree of match between a child's temperament and the nature of the demands of the environment in which they are being raised
Parallel play	Play side by side as opposed to play involving give and take or the sharing of toys and ideas; this helps toddlers to form attachments to their peers
Personality	The sum total of the characteristics that differentiate one person from another
Separation anxiety	The distress felt by children when their usual caregiver departs
Temperament	The patterns of emotions that are consistent and enduring characteristics of an individual
Temper tantrum	Emotional outburst that are the result of overwhelming frustration with which a child cannot otherwise cope