



Top Tips for 2 year olds

A two year old is discovering the world about them through all that they do. When they were younger, they were held, carried and shown things by their carers. Now they are increasingly mobile and are able to explore their environment for themselves. This is hugely exciting for them – and also a little bit scary so they need to know that their carer is a safe base that they can come back to reliably as they explore. It is also demanding for carers as their desire to explore is stronger than their understanding of safety.

“Two year olds are curious and keen to explore and discover more about their world. They are creative thinkers who have a “can do” attitude to life. They have a strong drive to do things for themselves whilst at the same time needing consistency of routines and caring adults who understand them.” (Supporting and enhancing two year old provision)

As practitioners we need to respect how it feels to be two – being two is not easy. It can be like an emotional see saw; sometimes you feel big and strong – you declare your independence in all kinds of ways; you want to be respected and you want space. Other times you feel small and vulnerable; the world is large and scary and you want to be hugged and comforted like the baby you used to be. One moment they are trustful and endearing; the next, they throw their weight around like a teenager. Its hard for the practitioner to know how the child is feeling (but effective key person relationships will support this) and sometimes we just don't get it right...resulting in tempers, tantrums, etc. It's important that practitioners remain patient and try to understand the child's viewpoint to be consistent. A sense of humour is also very helpful.

Tips to consider when working with two year olds

- **Empathise:** You may not care that the blue plate is dirty, but your child does. Put yourself in their shoes and let them know that you understand the challenge (even if you don't agree). "You were really hoping for the blue plate today! I know it's your favorite."
- **Separation:** Ensure your child can separate from you without causing them stress,
- **Limit "no":** Save the word "no" for dangerous or really serious situations. Instead, use redirection, "Those are mummy's pens, let's find some crayons for you to use." Or, turn a "no" into a "yes, with a condition" by saying, "You may go outside after we change your nappy".
- **Teach:** Act as your child's guide to better behavior by taking the time to explore and practice new ways to manage difficult situations. "You both want the ball. I'm going to roll my ball to you. Can you roll it back?" Act it out together, use their toys, tell a story, draw a picture. Allow your child to play with real items such as lettuce leaf or lemon they will learn much more by playing with real item such as the texture, smell and taste of the item than they will from seeing a picture.
- **Be silly:** Channel your inner-child by bringing some joy, laughter, and silliness into your day. Use a robot voice to make a request, chase them around the room walking like a gorilla. Look for ways to turn boring or mundane things into a game, this can be especially useful when it comes to tidy up time.
- **Give them the words:** Your child may not be able to verbalize their thoughts or feelings in a way that is rational and logical (or coherent). Model alternative ways to express her need: "Your shoe is too tight." or "You need one more hug before mummy goes to work".
- **Set boundaries:** Help your child feel safe and secure by clarifying the boundaries in their life, such as, "no running in the street," to "you can be mad but we do not hit others." Expect some resistance, and stay consistent and empathize with their feelings.
- **Slow down:** Toddlers move at their own pace. (Sometimes this pace requires a lot of patience from you!) Look for ways to go with their natural rhythm. Instead of always forcing him to "hurry up," plan a lot of extra time so he can look at each and every bug on the way to the car.
- **Change the environment:** Use baby gates, cabinet locks, and limit access to breakable or unsafe objects. Give them access to age-appropriate things using low coat hooks or stools. And, find an area of the home or garden where they can be loud, messy or energetic!
- **Encourage independence:** Your child may be capable of more than you realise, your first instinct may be to step in and do it for them, but children learn a lot through struggle and challenge. Give them opportunities to help with tasks or try something new before you intervene.

Environment tips

A supportive physical environment

Consider 'How we can develop the physical environment to support children during the unique phase of being two?'

This should be considered very carefully in your setting/team to ensure that what you provide meets this unique phase.

The environment should partner the warm caring relationships essential to children's emotional well being.

Must create a 'can do' environment to support two year olds drive 'to do it myself'.

Dependable environment - First, the environment should be dependable. Young children need to know what to expect. They find security in repeatedly returning to their favourite spaces. They like to enter the room and know where everything is. Its important that each child has a designated space for their personal belongings.

Equipment that builds cooperation

Resources and equipment within the environment:

Sharing is still a new concept, so its vital to provide enough resources so that children need not guard things from each other.

Two's are emerging from babyhood (when their thinking centres around their own immediate needs) to a growing understanding of others – this is a big learning curve; we support this by providing equipment that builds co-operation (like above):

- From the **browser box** children can play together independently selecting and sharing their books and toys.
- **Push me pull me** ride on's (and similar) encourage collaborative play as opposed to children fighting over a limited number of single user bikes, trikes, etc.
- **Sand tray** encourages collaborative play; need to provide several of the same objects.
- Treasure baskets with several of the same objects encourages collaborative play that builds cooperation.

Peaceful environment - Two year olds thrive in a peaceful environment. They are only just learning how to control their feelings. Too much stimulation; visual or auditory, for e.g. too much noise, too much dingle dangles or bright colourful displays, can result in overload and cause children to become distressed and overwhelmed. This can often be observed in their behaviour – practitioners must be mindful and understanding of this.

The outdoor environment - Children need to be provided with daily opportunities (free flow is preferred although can be problematic) to play outside and to engage with nature.

They need to experience the seasons first hand; the warmth of the sun, the coldness of the wind, the iciness of frost, the coldness (and taste even) of snow, the feel and sound of the rain. Learning through all their senses.

They enjoy turning over stones to discover worms and bugs.

They are intrigued by flowers and insects (when developing your garden, consider which types of shrubs might attract birds or butterflies.)

They love to dig and plant.

Playing outside releases endorphins (happy hormones) and reduces stress – children often display greater levels of cooperation.

“By the time I am two I have a story to tell about lots of things. The highlights of my story give you insights about the understanding I have and the things I can do now. To understand me you need to know about the main characters in my story, where things have happened, what the important events have been and what my everyday experience has been. The story has special meaning for me and must be viewed from my perspective.”

From I am two! - Kay Mathieson

