



## Stimulating Your Toddler

However much we magically want to create intelligent toddlers, it is not all that simple. Most people want the best possible education for their children and are prepared to pay quite a prize for that. Very little parents realize what an important role they play in their toddler's stimulation. If it does take some effort from them, they either prefer to get it done in the quickest possible way so that they can go ahead with their lives. Or they offer all their time and effort to super-stimulate their toddler(s) and try and raise the next Einstein. What is the golden rule as far as stimulation is concerned?

One story Einstein liked to tell about his childhood was of a "wonder" he saw when he was four or five years old: a magnetic compass. The needle's invariable northward swing, guided by an invisible force, profoundly impressed the child. The compass convinced him that there had to be "something behind things, something deeply hidden." Einstein had no special education written behind his name. His thoughts were stimulated by his uncle, an engineer, and by a medical student who ate dinner once a week at the Einsteins'. This triggered his fascination with science and laid the foundation to an amazing career. He had no expensive toys and computer programs: people inspired him to reach his full potential.

### The drive towards independence

Keep in mind that your whole idea is to get your toddler to become independent. Let the toddler's drive towards independence lead you. Strive towards that by allowing him to do things for himself. By the age of one a toddler demands to feed himself. Of course you will have a spoonful at hand to help him get what he needs, but it is most important that you let him also eat independently by offering him finger foods. The more the toddler gets the opportunity to do things for himself, the better his self-esteem will be. Have the tooth brush ready to do the necessary, but also allow him to do some brushing himself and praise him for doing so. A toddler's self-esteem thrives on appropriate praise.

### Here are a few emotionally healthy ways in which you may engage with your toddler:

- “Bond with your child, take time and be present. Encourage spontaneous imaginative play, either alone or with parents/caregivers and other children. Spend time playing, climbing, splashing, crawling and spinning with children in nature, allowing them to lead the play process. Rough-and-tumble play is good for both child and parent. Allow children to create their own toys. Stay clear of non-creative, fully constructed commercial toys.
- Read and participate with full attention when with a child. Encourage age creative, imaginative story making and play acting.
- Encourage and allow full emotional expression moving to rational dialogue between the ages of 3 – 5 years.
- Expose children to good consonant music. Sing and dance with children. Encourage them to explore musical instruments and musical styles.
- Honour care of other people, pets and objects.
- Encourage a sense of time and delayed gratification.
- Discourage any TV, video games or computers until at least age 8.
- Provide a loving, low stress environment, and model rich emotional expression and stability. Model JOY.”

Lynette Van Wyk  
Toddlers Workshop, Port Elizabeth  
lynettem@gmail.com