

# Helping Your Toddler Through Change

Toddlers like routine. So when change happens, it can be hard on them.

### Signs Your Toddler is Upset

Your toddler may not be able to tell you in words how she's feeling. Instead, she may:

- not want to eat
- cry
- have nightmares or problems sleeping
- have temper tantrums
- be clingy
- be very quiet
- go back to old habits like sucking her thumb



#### KEY TAKEAWAY

When change happens, tell your toddler that she's loved, that she'll always be taken care of and that the change isn't her fault.

### Dealing With Planned Changes

With some changes – like a new baby or moving house – you can prepare your toddler in advance. Try:

- ✓ using positive words to talk about the upcoming change
- ✓ listening to her worries
- ✓ answering her questions simply and honestly
- ✓ telling her everything will be okay
- ✓ reading books on the subject to her
- ✓ giving her toys that let her act out the change – a toy truck if you're moving, for example
- ✓ not taking on more than one big change at a time
- ✓ making extra time to connect, and giving lots of love and attention
- ✓ making time for her usual routines and favourite activities



#### DID YOU KNOW

When faced with big changes, it's normal for toddlers to temporarily return to old habits (like using diapers) or challenging behaviours (like throwing tantrums). Be patient and provide extra love and support.

### A new baby

A new baby changes routines and takes time and attention away from your toddler. So it's normal for her to be upset.

Help your toddler prepare by:

- ✓ letting her feel the baby kick
- ✓ reading her books about babies and big brothers and sisters
- ✓ showing your toddler her own baby pictures and talking about what she was like as a baby
- ✓ giving her a baby doll to care for
- ✓ making any big changes – like toilet learning – as early as possible before the birth, or waiting until after the birth, when your toddler has had time to adjust
- ✓ talking to her about what babies do or visiting friends with babies, so she knows what to expect
- ✓ planning for her care during the delivery. If you want her to be at the birth, arrange for someone other than your partner to take care of her. And tell her about the medical equipment she might see.

On the day of the birth, try:

- ✓ keeping your toddler's day as normal as possible
- ✓ having her visit the baby when no other visitors are there
- ✓ letting her hold and talk to the baby
- ✓ talking about how much the baby looks like her or how much the baby seems to like her

At home after the birth, try:

- ✓ keeping up your previous routines
- ✓ making time to do the special things you used to do together
- ✓ being extra patient with her, even if she returns to old habits
- ✓ including her in your time with the baby, like having her sit with you while you breastfeed
- ✓ not using the baby as a reason for not doing something. Instead of "I can't play with you because I have to feed the baby," for instance, try, "When I've finished feeding the baby, let's play!"

As your children grow, try:

- ✓ valuing their differences, instead of comparing them
- ✓ encouraging them to play together and also giving them time apart
- ✓ letting each one know they're special
- ✓ not giving them labels like "the baby"
- ✓ setting clear rules for how they treat each other



## Dealing With Loss and Grief

### Death

Your toddler doesn't understand that some things are final. So she may have little or no reaction to someone's death. Or she may cry, be angry, or worry that someone else will die.

Before facing a loss, prepare your toddler by:

- ✓ teaching her that death is a part of life by talking about things like the changing of the seasons
- ✓ answering questions truthfully without creating new fears. If she asks, "Will you and I die?" you can say, "Yes, we all die, but Mommy won't die for a very long time and neither will you."

When a loved one or a pet dies, try:

- ✓ using simple words
- ✓ giving details only if she asks
- ✓ talking about your cultural and religious beliefs about death
- ✓ letting her express her feelings
- ✓ showing her that grief is normal and will change over time
- ✓ keeping daily routines so she feels secure
- ✓ talking about the person or pet and looking at pictures
- ✓ giving her extra love and attention



### DID YOU KNOW

Even if you don't tell your toddler about a serious loss, she'll sense that something is different. And not telling her may make her more afraid.



### TRY THIS

When a loved one dies, don't say he's "gone to sleep" or "gone away" or your toddler may get scared of sleeping or travelling.



### FAMILY STORY

When my brother died unexpectedly, I gently explained to our 2-year-old that his uncle had died and wouldn't be back again. He just said "OK" and that was it. A few weeks later, though, he asked when he was coming to visit. He didn't understand that it was final.

### Finding emotional support

When you're going through difficult times, it's okay for your child to see that you're upset. Explain to them what's going on and how you're feeling in a way that they can understand. But remember that your child is not the right person to go to for emotional support. Find another adult – a friend, health care provider or counsellor – to talk to.

### Family breakup

If your family breaks up, your toddler needs to feel safe and secure.

Help your toddler by:

- ✓ being calm and patient, despite your feelings
- ✓ giving her lots of love and attention, and telling her you won't leave her
- ✓ keeping to your usual routines and rules
- ✓ letting her ask questions, even if she asks the same ones over and over
- ✓ giving direct and simple answers
- ✓ telling her it's not her fault
- ✓ letting her talk happily about her other parent, and not speaking negatively about them to her
- ✓ making sure any new home she'll be spending time at is comfortable and welcoming

See Family Resources in the [Resources](#) chapter for more information.



### TRY THIS

After a separation, think of yourself and your ex-partner as co-workers with the shared job of caring for your toddler. If you're not ready to talk to each other calmly, use email or texts, or write information in a book that you send back and forth. And ask a friend or relative to help with pickup and drop-off.