



PHOENIX PLACE

Things To Do With Your Toddler – from 18 months to 2.5 years by Kathy Stirrup

So your little person is no longer a baby, but doesn't yet have the coordination and dexterity of a pre-schooler. What are the kind of things that you can do to happily fill your days together? Let's start with looking at what they are up to developmentally in each age group, and then match some activities to that.

At **eighteen months** most small people will be **walking** with reasonable confidence. They will even be beginning to push this one step further and testing out their **running**, and possibly their **jumping** too, although when this is first attempted at times feet can seem to be super-glued to the ground. They can climb up and down the stairs, holding onto a side rail. In fact **climbing** becomes their new favourite sport, with no household furniture being off limits from being turned into a jungle gym. It is an age of delighting in newly found big muscle and fine muscle skills. They love **pull along and push along toys**. They enjoy **scribbling** with pencils or crayons. They can often take off shoes and socks, sometimes at the most inopportune moments, like in the middle of a shopping centre without your notice. They begin to show more and more interest in **books**, and in **sounds**, and in **language**. Language-wise, they may have 20 or more recognisable words, and will often enjoy echoing speech, repeating the last word someone says to them or an obvious word in a sentence over and over again. They enjoy rhythmic sound such as **nursery rhymes**, and may attempt to join in with this.

Some activities to try...

Naming games

Point to people and objects and say their names. You can do this around the house, or in the garden, or on a walk.

Reading

Picture books, story books, touchy feely books, and sound books are all favourites at this age. You can also look at photos of family and friends, or make up a scrapbook of familiar things in their world, favourite people, toys or places to be, or maybe a scrapbook of a day in their life with a simple story, "James wakes up in the morning". "James puts on his clothes." "James has his breakfast" etc. Being very egocentric at this age, they love stories that centre on them.

Action nursery rhymes

For example, Pat-A-Cake, Incy Wincy Spider, Heads And Shoulders Knees And Toes. Little ones this age love the motions, rhymes and sounds, and the fact that you are involved singing them with them.

Music

Use household objects like wooden spoons and saucepans, or old formula tins, or make shakers with plastic drink bottles filled with rice or pulses (lids firmly secured) to create a band. Play music – either for children, or some of your own favourite music – with them, and groove along to the beat. Dance, sing and play your musical instruments.

Through the tunnel

Two large cardboard boxes taped together or two chairs with a blanket thrown over them can create a tunnel for your toddler to crawl through, or curl up quietly in for a time.

Posting games

Use an empty tissue box, or cut a slot in the top of a cardboard box or ice-cream container, to create a post-box for your toddler to post objects (such as milk container lids, or small wooden blocks) through.

Filling and emptying

Children this age love filling and emptying. In summer you can do this with water play, setting up a large container of water in the garden or verandah with some different smaller containers and scoops for them to pour water in and out of. In winter you could use things like dried rice, dried lentils or dried beans for them to pour and scoop up.

Block play

Little ones this age often love block play, stacking up towers and knocking them down again.

Peg play

Collect some pegs and a plastic container such as an ice-cream container. At first, place the pegs around the edge of the container yourself, and get your little one to pull them off and place them in the container. You can count them as they do this, or talk about their colours. Over time they may like to try putting the pegs on themselves – this takes a bit of fine muscle strength and eye-hand coordination.

At **two years old** your toddler's physical abilities are considerable. They can now **run** safely, dodging obstacles and stopping and starting without problem. They can **crouch** to rest or play with something on the floor, and then get up again without using their hands. They can **climb** up on furniture. **Ball play** becomes an area of interest for them at this age. They can **use toys inventively** as their imagination begins to really take off. They will also enjoy playing at cooking, sweeping and other household activities. They will be beginning to show a real interest in other children but will still usually **play alone alongside** them rather than with them. A preference for right or left handedness will be beginning to show. Their **drawings** are beginning to have more form, with circles and dots emerging from the scribbling. They will begin to have **favourite books** that they want to read repeatedly, and can often recite with detail. They will also be able to **recognise and label** different well known family members or friends in photographs. Speech-wise, they will now have a vocabulary of fifty or more words, but be able to understand many more. **Wanting to know the names of things** becomes a favourite game, as well as **singing nursery rhymes and songs**.

At **two and a half** your toddler will be able to **run** and **jump** with two feet together. They can **kick** a large ball and **climb** adeptly. They are becoming aware of the concepts of up/down, in/out, top/bottom, under/over. They can **push and pull** large toys skilfully, though will still have a little bit of trouble navigating obstacles. Their fine motor control has also improved with them being able to **pick up very small objects**. They can **build towers** of more than seven bricks high. If they have had the practice, their **drawing** abilities have also improved with them beginning to imitate circles and lines, and they may attempt to **write** some letters like V, L, or H. They can also **feed themselves** skilfully with a spoon, and even a fork.

They are still **emotionally dependent on adults**, and when frustrated will have temper tantrums. They watch other children play and **may join in** for short periods of time, but sharing is often still a challenge.

They know their full name and can use the pronouns "I" "Me", and "You". They will now have a vocabulary of 200 or more words and understand even more. This is the age of "**what**", "**why**" and "**how**".

Activities to try...

Water play

This is still a favourite and can be carried out the same as above, filling a large container with water and having various cups and containers to empty and fill, or you can add sieves, funnels, sponges, ladles and watering cans into the mix.

Sand play

Sand is another favourite. You can buy a small sand-pit for your garden or verandah, or fill a blanket box with some sand to make one yourself. Use buckets, spades, sand moulds, cups, sieves and let them explore. You can sing songs or nursery rhymes as you play alongside them.

Play dough

There are lots of different play dough recipes online that you can make up for yourself, or you can use the commercially made ones. Use rollers and cookie cutters and help your toddler to squeeze, roll, cut the dough into shapes. You might help them make little characters to use in their own imaginative play or to tell stories with, such as The Three Little Pigs or The Billy Goats Gruff.

A play dough recipe you could use:

2 cups of plain flour, 1 cup of salt, 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar, 2 tablespoons of cooking oil, 2 cups of cold water, some food colouring

Mix all ingredients together in a microwaveable bowl, cover with a lid or cling-film, and place in the microwave on high for two minute intervals, stirring in between, till cooked (comes away from the sides of the bowl and forms a non-goey ball). It often takes about 6 mins all up, depending on your microwave.

Finger painting

You can use normal poster paint or bought finger paint, or you can make your own by making up a cornflour paste (see recipe below). Place scoops of the paint onto a hard surface like a table and let them swirl their fingers through it. They can use their full hands, their finger tips or their nails to

create patterns. When they have finished, you can use a clean piece of paper to take a print of their work.

Recipe for finger paint:

Mix 2 tablespoons of cornflour with enough cold water to form a paste in a saucepan. Add about 1 cup of water and cook on the stove until it reaches a custard-like consistency. Add ordinary poster paint or food colouring. Cool before use.

Painting of all sorts

There are so many different ways that you can paint with your child. **Easel painting** is great for their development, as it helps them with crossing their midline and getting their brain working. You can use various thickness of brushes for this with poster paint or finger paint for a different effect. On a table you can use poster paint with a variety of **different brushes** like old washing up brushes, scrubbing brushes, toothbrushes, or old shaving brushes. Children this age quite enjoy using the familiar household objects to paint with. You can play to their developing fine motor skills and do **string paintings** by clipping a piece of string onto a peg and then using this to dip into different coloured poster paint and then dropping, dragging, flicking or pulling this across a sheet of paper to create a picture. You can create **sponge paintings** using small sponge pieces clamped into a peg and dipped into poster paint then dragged or dabbed or brushed across some paper to create a picture. **Balloons** filled with a little water and tied up can make great printers when dipped into poster paint or finger paint and then dabbed onto paper. **Butterfly paintings** can be created by folding a piece of paper in half. Open it out full again and then help your little one to add blobs of different coloured poster paint to one side of the paper. Fold the paper closed over again and help your toddler to squidge the paint around over the second side of the paper, then open out to see their beautiful butterfly.

Pretend play

Have dress-up clothes available, these can be store bought - princesses, superheros, pirates, cowboys, doctors, nurses – or your old cast-offs. You can use different lengths of materials for them to create their own creations from. You could set up

- an office with old phones, pens and papers, an old computer and some desks and chairs
- a shop with items from your pantry and a calculator and baskets
- a classroom with a whiteboard and some tables, chairs and pens and papers and books
- a hospital with dolls and a doctor or nurse outfit or vet surgery with stuffed animals for patients.

Getting outdoors

Getting out and about, going on a walk to explore your neighbourhood, looking at different plants or the numbers on letterboxes, spotting red cars or blue cars, big trucks or buses, dogs, cats or birds. Taking time to watch some ants or to drop pebbles in a stream, or to build a house out of sticks in the woodlands or bush. Going to a park and making use of the climbing equipment to help encourage your child's emerging big muscle skills, and social skills with friends you may find there.

There are lots and lots of things that you can do with this age group who are no longer babies and have many new skills physically and with their language. Their imaginations are taking off as is their desire to explore their wider world, so join in the fun and enjoy.