

# Toddler Steps

1-3 YEARS

Toddlers are curious about the world around them. They love to work out what different things do and what they can do with them. They're also developing strong attachments to the people they love. Through play, your toddler is learning and developing in many ways.

This pack gives ideas on how to interact and connect with your toddler through play. As your toddler plays, try to follow their lead – notice what they're interested in and respond to what they say and do. Your toddler learns best when they're interested in an activity. And it keeps their attention focused for a little bit longer.

This pack also provides practical information on how to keep your home safe for your toddler, how to care for them, and where you can find more information and support.



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# Play and your toddler

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

### Play is important for your toddler's development.

Play helps your toddler:

- Explore their world in a safe way
- Develop thinking skills
- Develop physical skills
- Develop communication and social skills
- Become more confident
- Build relationships, especially with you
- Feel happy, loved and secure

So your toddler gets the most out of play try to give them:

- Plenty of praise as they explore and problem solve – this keeps play fun and encourages them to keep trying, even when things get challenging.
- A chance to try things out for themselves – you can still step in to help when they need it.
- Your full attention – this helps them feel valued, safe and secure. Putting your phone and other devices away will help.

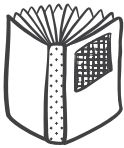


Scan this QR Code for more information  
**on toddler's play and learning.**

# How to use the items in your play pack



Scan this QR Code for a video demonstration on how to use the toys and books in the Toddler Pack.



## BOOKS

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Reading with your toddler promotes their brain development, language, communication, imagination, curiosity and learning. The quality time you spend reading together also strengthens your relationship.

Slowly read each page of the board book and point to the object or picture. Try to make the tone of your voice go up and down. Try out funny noises and sounds, and use different voices for different characters.

Involve your toddler as you read. For example, 'Can you point to the cat?' or 'What sound does a cat make?' You could also show your toddler how to lift a flap then let them try too. And at the end of each page, say 'turn the page' and let your toddler turn the pages.

Your toddler will be learning new words and sounds as you read and look at pictures together. Older toddlers might be able to recognise and name shapes, colours, numbers or letters.

One of the books included in the pack is 'The Beach in the Bedroom', a bedtime story to read with your child.



Scan this QR Code for **Telling stories with children** video.



## **BLOCKS WITH SHAPE SORTER LID**

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Block play helps your toddler develop their motor skills, early numeracy skills, problem-solving skills and imagination – all while having fun.

Start by showing your toddler how to stack the blocks on top of each other to make a simple tower. Then you can show your toddler how to make different shapes with the blocks. For example: 'This is a triangle because it has 3 sides' or 'This is a square because it has 4 equal sides'. You can also name the colours of the different blocks.

Younger toddlers might prefer to knock down a tower of blocks. Older toddlers might be able to name basic shapes and colours themselves. Ask 'What colour is this?' or 'What shape is this?'

Encourage your toddler's creativity by asking questions like, 'What can we build with these blocks?' Play along with them, making towers or patterns, and let them experiment and explore on their own.

To teach your toddler how to use blocks with a shape-sorting lid, start by showing them how to match the blocks to the shapes on the lid. For example, you can fit a block into the correct shape and say, 'Look, this square block goes into the square hole!' Encourage your child to try it themselves, only offering guidance if they need it.



## ROLE PLAY PICNIC SET

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This playful activity helps develop your toddler's imagination and social skills – it's also fun!

Start by showing your toddler how to set up the basket, tablecloth and pretend food. Show them how to arrange the 'food' on the 'table' and use the crockery and cutlery.

Invite your toddler to join in and help set up, asking them questions like 'What should we put in the basket?', 'What would you like to eat and drink?' or 'Which plate do you want to use?'

Encourage your toddler to pretend to serve and eat the food. You can also make up stories together about the picnic. For example, you could ask your toddler 'What special occasion are we celebrating?' or 'Who did you invite to this picnic?'



## SOFT TOY ANIMAL

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Playing with the soft toy animal helps your toddler use their imagination and practise storytelling.

Show your toddler how to gently hold the soft toy in their hand. Make the toy 'dance' or 'talk' by gently moving it and using a fun voice. You might like to 'feed' the toy using pretend food from the picnic basket or put it down for a 'nap' using the basket as a cot and the tablecloth as the bedding.

Encourage your toddler to come up with their own ideas for playing with the toy and join in their game. Ask questions like, 'What do you think they should do next?'



Scan this QR Code to **Imagining, Creating and Play** for more ideas that encourage your toddler's imagination and creativity.



## PAPER AND COLOURED PENCILS AND CRAYONS

Drawing helps your toddler develop their motor skills and creativity while having fun with art.

To teach your toddler how to use the crayons and pencils, start by showing them how to hold the crayons and pencils. Then make simple marks together on the paper.

For older toddlers, show them how to use different colours to make lines, shapes or simple drawings. Name the colours and shapes as you draw – for example, 'This is a yellow circle'.

Encourage your toddler to explore and create their own designs.



Scan this QR Code for more ideas  
**on drawing, scribbling and writing**  
activities for children 1-6 years



## EMOTIONS FLASH CARDS

The emotions flash cards help your toddler learn how to recognise different emotions based on a person's facial expressions. It's easier for children to learn about emotions through play, when they're relaxed and interested.

Start by showing your toddler one card at a time and naming the emotion, like 'happy' or 'sad'. Make it fun by matching the facial expressions yourself – for example, smile and say, 'This is a happy face!'



Scan this QR Code to **Emotions and Play**  
to offer other play ideas that help  
toddlers learn about emotions.





## PUZZLES

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Puzzles help your toddler learn about shapes, improve their problem solving skills and learn about how things fit together.

Here's how to use the shape puzzle:

- Show your toddler how each shape fits into its own matching place. For example, 'This circle goes in the round hole.'
- Name each shape your toddler picks up.
- Let your toddler try putting the shapes into the puzzle themselves. If they need help, gently guide them by pointing to the correct shape and hole.

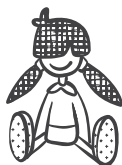
Here's how to use the 'Jungle' or 'Under the Sea' puzzle:

- Start by showing your toddler how to fit the pieces together to make a complete picture.
- Explain that each piece has a specific spot – for example, 'This piece is the giraffe's neck. It goes here, under the giraffe's head.'
- Help your toddler match a few pieces, then let them try on their own. You can offer hints if they need help.

Puzzles are a great way to develop your toddler's cognitive development – that is, their ability to think, understand, communicate, make memories, imagine and work out what might happen next.



Scan this QR Code **for other play ideas** to encourage your toddler's cognitive development.



## DOLLS

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Playing with dolls is a fun way for children to practise their imagination, develop their communication skills, learn about caring for others and about emotions.

Here are ideas to help your toddler play with dolls:

- Encourage your toddler to take care of their dolls – for example, to feed them and put them to sleep.
- Ask your toddler about their dolls – for example, ‘What are their names?’, ‘What are they doing now?’ or ‘How are they feeling?’
- Make up simple stories or scenarios for the dolls together – for example, ‘The dolls are going on a picnic. What should they bring?’ You might like to use the picnic set for this.



Scan this QR Code to **Creative activities for toddler learning and development**



## BALLS

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Playing with balls helps your toddler develop their hand-eye coordination and motor skills while enjoying themselves.

To teach your toddler how to play with the large ball, start by showing them how to gently roll the ball. Sit on the floor and roll the ball to them, encouraging them to roll it back to you. You can also show how to gently kick or bounce the ball and then encourage them to try. Keep the game simple and fun.

To teach your toddler how to play with the small dimpled ball, start by showing them how to gently squeeze and release the ball to feel its texture. Then, show them how to roll or bounce the ball on the floor. Encourage your toddler to try it themselves and cheer them on as they explore how the ball feels and moves.



Scan this QR Code to get **more ideas for ball playing.**



## MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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Learning how to use basic musical instruments helps toddlers develop their motor skills and hand-eye coordination as they practise holding and using the instruments. It also boosts their sense of rhythm and creativity.

To teach your toddler how to use rhythm sticks, show them how to hold one stick in each hand and gently tap them together to make a sound. Encourage them to experiment with different rhythms, like tapping slowly or quickly. Show them how to tap harder for loud sounds and more gently for quiet sounds.

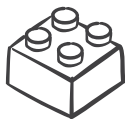
For the hand bells, show your toddler how to gently hold the handle and ring the bells by moving their hand up and down. Encourage them to experiment with ringing it softly or loudly and to make up their own simple tunes.

For the shaker, show your toddler how to hold it and then shake it back and forth to make noise. Encourage them to experiment with different rhythms by shaking it slowly or quickly.

Once your toddler gets the hang of it, try dancing around together while making music!



Scan this QR Code for some  
**Baby Karaoke fun.**



## DUPLO

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Playing with Duplo helps your toddler develop fine motor skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

To teach your toddler how to play with Duplo, start by showing them how to stack the blocks to build simple towers or structures. Show them how to snap the blocks together and pull them apart.

Name the different colours and shapes as your toddler plays. Older toddlers might be able to name colours themselves. Ask your toddler 'What colour is this block?' or 'What shape is this block?' If they are unsure, you can tell them the answer and then find another block with the same colour or size to give your toddler another try. This can make it easier for them to remember.

You can also teach your toddler about size. Hold up a large and a small block and ask 'Which block is bigger?' or 'Which block is smaller?' If they are unsure, you can tell them the answer and give them another try.

Encourage your toddler to try building their own creations. If they are unsure where to start, you can suggest ideas like making a tower or a house.

To teach your toddler how to play with Duplo people, show them how to place the people on different blocks or vehicles. Encourage them to create simple stories or scenarios, like having the Duplo people go on adventures or visit each other. Join in the play by making up fun interactions and asking questions like, 'Where is the person going next?'



## TOY CARS

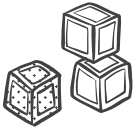
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Playing with toy cars helps improve your toddler's coordination and imaginative skills.

Give your toddler one car and then you can use the other car to show them how to push it along the floor.

Move the car to show your toddler different directions – for example, forward, backward or in circles. Show different speeds too – fast and slow. You might also like to name the colour of the cars and count how many wheels they have.

You can then 'race' the cars or make them go on a pretend journey together. Encourage your toddler to create their own stories or adventures. Ask questions like 'Where are the cars going?' or 'What happens next?'



## UNSTRUCTURED PLAY

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Unstructured, free play is unplanned play that happens naturally, depending on what catches a child's interest in the moment. It's particularly important for toddlers because it's a great way for them to explore, follow their own interests, use their imagination and make their own choices.

You might see your toddler deciding to explore drawers or pick up sticks and leaves. You can also point your toddler in the right direction – for example, towards plastic cups, cardboard boxes or a pile of clothes. And you can encourage your toddler's play by asking questions about what they're doing – for example, 'What animal are you pretending to be?'



Scan this QR Code to **Imagining, Creating and Play** for more ideas that encourage your toddler's imagination and creativity.

## CHILDPROOFING DEVICES

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To use the Dreambaby Baby Proof Home Safety Kit, start by reading the instructions for each item.

Here are general tips for the kit:

- Install outlet covers by pushing them into electrical sockets to keep your toddler safe from electric shocks.
- Use multipurpose latches by sticking the adhesive strips to the outside cabinet doors to prevent little hands from opening them.
- Make sure the item is securely attached and that they stay in place – check this regularly.
- This kit helps you keep your home safer for your toddler as they explore.
- For further instructions go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MddlTuJ7DOQ>

We also recommend checking out [kidsafe.com.au](http://kidsafe.com.au) and [raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au) for more information.



Scan this QR Code for more information from the *Raising Children Network*.



# Safety

An important part of raising a toddler is making sure your home environment is safe.

Homes have many potential hazards for children. But you can keep your toddler safe by finding out what the risks are and then preventing or removing them.

Below are safety tips for reducing risks in your home:

## **GENERAL SAFETY**

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- Keep chemicals, cleaning products, button batteries and medicines out of reach and out of sight, up high in locked or childproofed cupboards.
- Make sure all heavy furniture is properly secured or bolted to the wall.
- If there are stairs in your home, use approved safety gates and securely fit them at the top and bottom of stairs.

## **STRANGULATION AND SUFFOCATION SAFETY**

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- Keep strangulation risks out of reach of children. This includes curtain or blind cords or chains, necklaces, ribbons, drawstring bags and cords on clothing or hats.
- Keep plastic bags, plastic wrap and dry-cleaning bags out of reach as these can cause suffocation.

## **CHOKING SAFETY**

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- Keep small objects out of reach – usually anything smaller than a 20-cent coin. For example, coins, pen lids, button batteries, small magnets, water beads and broken or uninflated balloons. Frequently check toys for loose or small parts.
- Always supervise your toddler when they eat and make sure they remain seated.
- Peel skin off fruit, remove bones from meat and fish, and remove pips from foods like cherries and olives.
- Cook, grate or mash hard foods. Don't give your toddler whole nuts and seeds or similar hard foods.



## BURNS, SCALDS AND FIRE SAFETY

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- Always supervise carefully when children are in the kitchen.
- Try cooking while your toddler is asleep or in a playpen or highchair.
- Turn handles on pots and pans towards the back of the stove.
- Keep hot drinks well out of reach. Don't cook or have hot drinks or food while holding a child.
- Keep all electrical appliances out of reach. Secure any loose cords. Unplug appliances when they're not in use. Put safety covers on all electrical outlets that are not in use.
- Make sure there are working smoke alarms in your home and replace the batteries regularly. Keep matches and lighters well out of reach.

## WATER SAFETY

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- Always stay with your toddler and watch closely whenever they're near water.
- Always empty the bathtub, buckets or kiddie pools immediately after use.

We also recommend checking out [kidsafe.com.au](https://kidsafe.com.au) and [raisingchildren.net.au](https://raisingchildren.net.au) for more information.



Scan this QR Code for more information from the *Raising Children Network*.



# Caring for your toddler

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Movement is very important for toddlers' health, wellbeing and development. Toddlers should get at least 3 hours of physical activity each day. This can include walking, running, jumping, kicking, throwing, playing on playground equipment, using ride-on toys, and dancing.



Scan this QR Code for more information and ideas about **physical activity for toddlers.**

## HEALTHY EATING

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Toddlers need to eat a wide variety of fresh foods from the 5 healthy food groups:

- vegetables and legumes
- fruit
- cereals and grain foods
- dairy and dairy alternatives
- meat and meat alternatives.

Each food group has different nutrients, which your toddler's body needs to grow and function properly.

Toddlers can be picky eaters and their appetites can change from day to day. Your responsibility is to offer your toddler healthy food and opportunities to eat it. It's up to your toddler to decide whether to eat and how much. If your toddler is growing and developing well, they're probably getting enough to eat.

One of the best ways to encourage your toddler to eat well is to let them see you make your own healthy eating choices every day. It can also help to have mealtimes sitting down together, without screens or other distractions.



Scan this QR Code for more details on **the foods your toddler needs.**

## SCREEN TIME

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Current guidelines recommend that **children under 2 years old** don't have any screen time except for supervised video calls with family and friends.

For children over 2 years old, it's best to choose high quality, educational programs. There are many free programs on ABC Kids iView like Play School, ABC SingSong, Alphablocks and Numberblocks.



Scan this QR Code for more information on screen time and toddlers.

## SLEEP

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Toddlers need 11–14 hours sleep every 24 hours. This often includes a 1–2 hour nap in the middle of the day.

Having a regular bedtime and wake up time each day (even on the weekends) can help children sleep well. A relaxing bedtime routine can also assist. This might include bathing or showering, getting dressed into pyjamas, brushing teeth then reading books and snuggling with you.

Avoid screen time for at least an hour before bedtime. Screen time can make it more difficult for your toddler to fall asleep.

If you have difficulty getting your toddler to sleep or have concerns about their breathing overnight, see your GP or paediatrician for more advice.



Scan this QR Code for more information on sleep.

## FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOUR

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Toddlers have big feelings that they often can't communicate in words. They might express their feelings through their facial expression, body language, play and behaviour.

Toddler tantrums are very common and are a natural part of development. Although they can be frustrating, the best way to respond to a tantrum is to stay calm.

You can help your toddler to identify and express their feelings in a healthy and safe way.

There are several free Australian resources available to support you:

- Raising Healthy Minds is a free, Australian government-funded app designed to help parents support their child's social and emotional wellbeing.
- The Triple P Positive Parenting Program provides free online parenting courses.
- Parentline Victoria is a phone service that offers confidential counselling and support on parenting issues. Call 13 22 89 (cost of a local call) – 8am to midnight, 7 days a week.



Scan this QR Code to access the free **Raising Healthy Minds** app.

# Maternal Child Health and Nurse Program

(MCHN)

Visits to a Maternal and Child Health Nurse (MCHN) are an important way of checking your toddler's growth and development. During the toddler years, visits are routinely scheduled at 12 months, 18 months and 2 years.

Please remember to bring your green book to each appointment. There is also a free Maternal and Child Health app you can download to access your child's health information on your mobile device.



Scan this QR  
Code to access  
information  
on the **Child  
and Family  
Health Nurse**

# Support

## SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

All parents need support from others at times. Seeking and accepting support is good for you and your toddler.

Support helps you be the parent you want to be. When parents are supported, they're better able to care for their children.

Many people and services can help you as you navigate the challenges that come with raising children. Talking to your GP or MCHN is a good place to start.



Scan these QR Codes to access  
**support for grown-ups.**



# Online and telephone resources

## FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT

- **1800respect**  
www.1800respect.org.au  
1800 737 732

## PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- **raisingchildren.net.au**  
www.raisingchildren.net.au
- **Raising Healthy Minds App**  
(free Australian app)
- **Maternal and Child Health Line**  
13 22 29
- **Parentline**  
www.parentline.com.au
- **Parentline Victoria**  
13 22 89
- **Triple P**  
triplep-parenting.net.au/au/  
triple-p/
- **Zero to Three**  
zerotothree.org

## GENERAL HEALTH

- **Better Health Channel**  
betterhealth.vic.gov.au

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- **Circle of Security International**  
circleofsecurityinternational.com
- **Family Relationships Online**  
https://www.familyrelationships.gov.au

## CHILD SAFETY AND ACCIDENT PREVENTION

- **Kidsafe Australia**  
www.kidsafe.com.au
- **Poisons Information Centre**  
13 11 26



Scan this QR Code to access the *Raising Children Network* website.



# Next Steps Australia

[info@nextstepsaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@nextstepsaustralia.org.au)

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In the spirit of reconciliation Next Steps Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

While we take care in compiling the toddler box and this material, your use of the items in the toddler box and your reliance on this material is entirely at your own risk. To the maximum extent permitted by law, Next Steps Australia Limited excludes all liability to you in respect of any loss or damage which may be suffered by you as a result of use of the items in the toddler box or reliance on this material.

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## EDISON

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For their advice on suitable toys for the Toddler packs, and resourcing and facilitating the purchase of these products.



Raising Children Network for their expertise and contributions to the development of the Toddler Steps resource.

## Readings

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### DR ANNEKE ENGWERDA,

Paediatrician, for the creation and content development of the Future Steps program – Toddler Steps.



**NEXT  
STEPS**  
AUSTRALIA