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Boosting Your Older Toddler's Brain

Your older toddler should be speaking new words, remembering more and exerting more independence than when he was a young toddler. As parents and caregivers, it is important to provide a safe, learning-rich environment for your toddler to explore using his or her whole body. Toys should be sturdy and large to withstand active play. To boost your toddler's social and cognitive development, begin pretend play and play that involves hiding and fetching toys.

Appropriate toys

Great toys for 2- to 3-year-olds include tricycles, wagons, large balls, push-pull toys, peg boards, blocks, weaving sets, pretend play sets, simple puzzles, large string beads, construction toys, play dough, large crayons, chalk, finger paint, safety scissors, paper, large pencils, books, magazines, musical instruments, dolls and puppets.

Activities

Here are a few ideas for a parent or caregiver to boost a toddler's brain activity and growth at each developmental stage.

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Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) program staff at MSU Extension can answer questions or help you learn more about money management, parent, food, nutrition and health issues. MSU Extension educators integrate university and community resources to provide tools that help families succeed. For more information on FCS programs in Michigan, call your county MSU Extension office. Check the government pages of your phone book for contact information.

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24 to 27 months:

- Play "Simon Says" to help point out and label different parts of your toddler's body.
- When saying nursery rhymes, emphasize the last word of every sentence to help your toddler learn how to rhyme.
- When you dance to music, bring in objects like scarves, crepe paper or ribbons to move along with your bodies.
- Examine different faces and expressions with your toddler by looking at books, magazines, real people or television. Help your child label the specific emotions.

27 to 30 months:

- Build small structures with blocks. Help your child make a house and then add animals and people. See if your child can copy a three- to four-piece block structure that you have made.
- Introduce sharing and turn-taking by letting your child play with her favorite toy and choosing a toy to play with yourself. Describe your toy and ask if she will share hers. Tell her you will share yours. Praise her if she agrees.
- Pick three items that have a distinct smell, like grape jelly, a pickle and an orange. Have your child close his eyes and see if he can guess what he smells. Offer to let him taste them.
- Cut out pictures from a magazine that your child recognizes and can label. Paste them on index cards. Put them in a pile and pull one out. Have your child (you can too) pretend to be whatever the picture is. For example, have your child pretend to be a car and imitate the sounds and movements it makes.

30 to 33 months:

- After it rains, go outside together and trace a line around a puddle with sidewalk chalk. As the day goes by, look at the difference between the line you drew and where the puddle currently is. Talk about where the water goes and why.
- When your child asks you to read his favorite book again, try asking him to read it to you while you turn the pages instead. Praise him if he tries!
- Sort different types of toys with your child by putting several into a pile. Help her sort by color, size or anything else that makes some of the toys similar.
- Go on a treasure hunt. Hide three or four small toys outside and tie a bright ribbon near them as a landmark. Walk around the yard with your child and drop a few hints about the ribbons. Toddlers love to find hidden treasures, so try to let him discover them with minimal help.

33 to 36 months:

- Use laundry baskets to help develop throwing skills. Throw wadded-up socks, beanbags or tennis balls into the basket. Move the basket closer or further away to make it more or less challenging.
- Try pouring food coloring and water into ice cube trays to make different colored ice cubes. After they freeze, play with them on a tray. Label all the colors as you play and stack, and talk about what happens when you mix two of the melting colors together.
- Use shopping coupons, magazines or flyers to cut out pictures for a pictured grocery list. Paste them onto index cards and take them to the store with you. Have your child look at the pictures and help you find the items in the store. Praise him for his efforts and help!

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- Explore musical instruments such as drums, drumsticks, the triangle, maracas and keyboards. Follow your child's lead in musical play.

Look for activities and keys to boosting your preschooler's brain development in a future edition. For more information on these and other parenting, money management, food, nutrition or health issues, contact the MSU Extension office. MSU Extension Family and Consumer Science educators are located in all 83 Michigan counties to integrate university and community resources to help families succeed.

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