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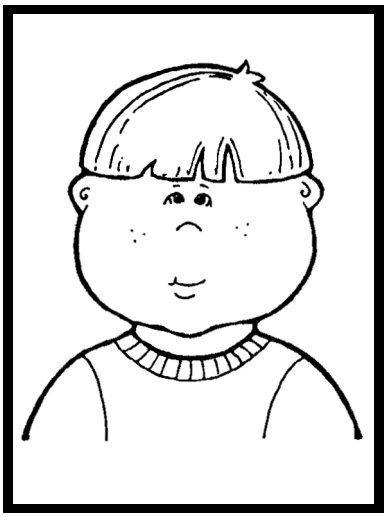
Part I
PROFILE OF THE TODDLER
OR
'THE MUG SHOT'

It takes large doses of trust, courage and innocence to repeatedly take on the world when you are less than a metre tall – but that is just what the toddler does! Assured that adults will be there to guide and protect, the toddler plunges into a discovery of self and the environment – the 'world' broadening as mobility increases. The once dependent infant is now a baby/child and learning to be an independent 'I' separate from mother. 'Mine' and 'Me' and 'No' are typical utterances you hear from the toddler, reflecting this new-found independence.



The toddler years (between ages one and three) can try the patience of even the most serene adult, but this period can also be one of the more rewarding stages for the parent or caregiver. Investigating, climbing, opening drawers and doors, taking things apart – the toddler resembles a battery-powered toy that 'just keeps going and going and going!' Encourage this exploration by providing a safe and interesting environment and realising that the toddler learns through sensory stimulation – seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling. Toddler play is usually messy and everything in the environment is fair game!

Toddlers may have trouble telling you all that they learn, but clearly 'communicate' with smiling, babbling, crying, biting and hugging. The challenge for the adult caregiver is to 'read' the communication and respond appropriately. Does the expression mean the toddler is frustrated, tired, hurt, angry, hungry or just unsure? Until expressive language approaches the level of receptive language, you are the toddler's interpreter. You may not get the interpretation right the first time, but keep on trying!

You are also the toddler's coach, cheer squad and referee! To meet these heavy demands, you need to take extra care of yourself. A break or 'time out' is necessary every few hours if you are hoping to continue as a firm, patient, flexible and loving parent or caregiver. With your renewed energy and a firm grip on your sense of humour, you can thoroughly enjoy and appreciate the emerging wonders of this independent little person!

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Part II
HOW TODDLERS LEARN
OR
'THE CAT IS NOT A PULL TOY'

Toddlers, by nature, are active learners and therefore need plenty of opportunities for 'hands on' learning experiences. Being in a safe and secure environment with a consistent and skilled caregiver (be it a parent or child care provider) that the toddler can trust, automatically stimulates learning. Just as any human being learning a new skill, if a toddler is given respect, guidance, encouragement and support to practise, skills (such as walking, talking, toilet training) will come much more easily.

Each toddler has an individual pattern and speed of learning. In case you need to be reminded of this fact, just read the children's book **Leo, the Late Bloomer** by Robert Kraus.

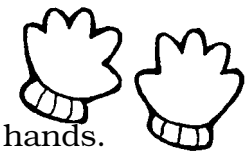
Sometimes, you may worry that a toddler is up against a definite 'stumbling block' that causes frustration in learning a skill (such as walking or talking) or developing normally. If you have any concerns or questions about your child's growth and development, do not hesitate to contact your local health agency or school nurse. They will offer you low or no-cost services such as screening, observation and assessment of your toddler to help identify developmental or medical concerns. These valuable community services are a great resource, so do not hesitate to use them!

Toddlers learn by **imitation**, **repetition** and **interaction** with others. Here are a few examples of activities in each of these learning areas.

Imitation
Toddlers are always watching! This is a good developmental time to model some excellent 'life-long' routines, such as washing hands properly and putting a barrier between contact with blood.

Washing Hands
With a small group (no larger than three) of toddlers, demonstrate how to wash hands at the sink they would normally use. You may want to chant or sing the directions.

1) Use soap and water.
2) Rub your hands vigorously.
3) Wash all surfaces (backs of hands, fingernails, wrists and between fingers).
4) Rinse well.
5) Dry hands with paper towel.
6) Turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands.



Dealing with Hurts

Again, show toddlers how you deal with hurts and create a 'help squad'. When someone gets hurt, one toddler fetches the Band-Aids, another gets the facial tissue (for the tears) and another soothes the victim. They watch as the teacher/provider uses disposable gloves or tissues to deal with any blood. The team effort promotes the 'caring for each other' concept, and the **boo-boo** provides an opportunity to teach good safety precautions.

Respect, caring and many developmental skills are learned through imitation. Remember this when there is a discipline problem and all the toddlers' eyes swing your way to see how you will cope!

Repetition (practice)

The old saying 'Practice makes perfect' has a lot of truth to it. Practice with 'toddling' leads to walking; practice with sounds leads to speech; practice with games leads to physical coordination; and so on. Among the activities listed in this book are those that offer practice with small muscle movement; those that practice distinguishing sounds and smells; and others that pursue the discovery of body parts and how they work.

Interaction with Others

Young toddlers usually interact very little with each other and engage in what we call 'parallel play'. This means that a toddler will usually play alongside another child or children at great length and even continue to watch out of the corner of his or her eye while the others play (remember the power of imitation!). As the toddler grows older, interaction will begin with others – usually just one child at a time. The 'friend' for a toddler is the one with whom interaction occurs at that particular moment. Many of the following activities will help to nurture that leap from parallel play to interaction.

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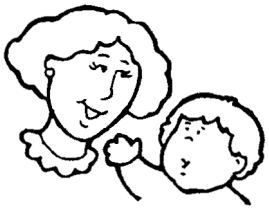
Part III
TODDLER ACTIVITIES
OR
'READY OR NOT, HERE I COME!'

How do you schedule a day for a toddler? Whether you have one toddler, several toddlers or a mixed-age group, setting up the home or centre environment is half the secret. The other half of the secret is that you, the parent or caregiver, must remain flexible and patient. Here is an example (keeping in mind that flexibility and spontaneity are the ingredients that make a special environment for toddlers) of a daily schedule for a toddler group that combines individual recognition with some general activities:

7.30 to 8.30 a.m.



Individual greeting as each child arrives. Nappy changed, if necessary. (Give the parent the option to do this.) Individual rocking, lap-sitting and reading by the caregiver. Breakfast, if necessary. Free-time choices, including table and rug toys, climbing and crawling equipment

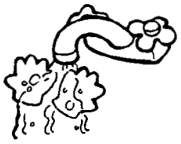
8.30 to 8.40 a.m.

Pick-up time – make it a game with a special song. Ask each child to do a particular part of the task.

8.40 to 8.45 a.m.

A 'hello' song that again acknowledges each toddler. You do not need to require them to sit down. Toddlers often like to 'swarm' and do body movements to the music. Also remember that toddlers enjoy repetition, so they may want to sing the song a few times. This 'hello' song is also part of the consistency of each day that makes a toddler feel secure.

8.45 to 9.00 a.m.



Toileting, changing nappies and washing hands; allow some time for washing hands as toddlers love to hold their hands under the tap and feel the water. This is a good age to teach proper hand-washing techniques.

9.00 to 9.15 a.m.

Morning snack (juice or milk, dry cereal or healthy finger-food) and good conversation (which means you sit down with the toddlers so you are at their eye level).

9.15 to 9.30 a.m.

Free-time choices (a time to explore)

9.30 to 10.00 a.m.

Outdoor/Large muscle activities – two caregivers that