

# **EXTENSION UPDATE**

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## **TESTING 1, 2, 3 . . .**

Has your “little angel” started coloring on your walls? Does your child throw cereal from the high chair even when told not to? Chances are, you’re the proud parent of a 2-year-old!

Your child is not a monster! In fact, this behavior is normal for toddlers.

Babies think everyone wants and likes the same things they do. At about 18 months of age, toddlers begin to understand that people think differently and like different things. That’s when the testing begins.

Toddlers don’t know if you will get mad or not, or what you’re like when you’re upset. That’s the point. They are testing you so they can learn.

Two-year-olds push your buttons because they need to know how you will respond. If you fail to respond or you act in a way that confuses them, like smiling instead of clearly telling them what you expect – they may try again.

If they push your buttons again and this time you yell, they see something different. The two-year-old might even try again. The two-year-old wants to know what it’s like when they push you too far.

Toddlers need to know how firm the boundaries are and where the boundaries are located. They want to know how you react, so they can learn what to expect.

The following are helpful parenting tips:

- Your child is also learning what things are safe to do and what things are not safe. They may want to try something that is dangerous. They may run into the street, jump into a lake or pool, or put something harmful into their mouth. It's up to you and the other care-providing adults to watch at all times for safety's sake.
- Expect your toddler to test you often. This is normal. Toddlers are learning how you react when they try something you don't want them to do.
- Every time your child tests you, try to respond in a consistent and loving way. Clear and firm boundaries for behavior are best.
- Provide safe ways for your toddler to explore and test.
- When you are tired of your child dumping the cereal on the floor to watch it scatter, take your child out of the high chair and think of another way for your child to explore. If dumping seems fun, fill a bottom drawer in the kitchen with plastic containers, spoons, measuring cups, and other safe items to fill up and dump out.

Remember your curious child is testing everything, including you. Hang in there! The trying times of the terrible twos don't last forever.

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