

Tots In Action: 12-18 Months¹

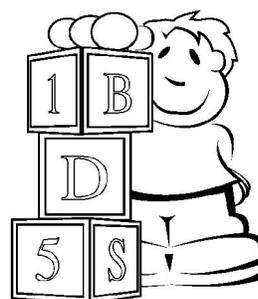
Millie Ferrer²



The Little Scientist Has Arrived

Hi! My name is Chris. I will guide you through my development for the next six months. Through my eyes, you will experience how I grow. Sometimes I'm called the little scientist. I love to explore and move around constantly. This is how I learn. I need you to help me develop my confidence and skills by providing me with a safe environment. Please baby proof my environment. I'm trying to become independent, but I still need your support and encouragement. When I get into mischief, understand I'm not deliberately trying to be naughty. I am curious and get overly enthusiastic about exploring. In order for me to develop into a socially happy person, I need for you to set some limits. I have to learn that I can't have it my way all of the time, so please be consistent in what I'm allowed to do and not do. Here are some ways I'm developing:

Physically



During the next few months my large and small muscle skills will improve rapidly. I will go from trying to walk by holding on to you or to our furniture, to walking by myself. This is exciting! Now I can:

- Hold a toy and walk at the same time, pull or push it.
- Climb on things like my stroller, chairs, tables . . . so watch me!
- Feed myself bits of cereal, vegetables and crackers.
- Drink from a cup and experiment with a spoon. I'm messy, so be patient with me, I'm learning.

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2. Millie Ferrer, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Human Development, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

- Stack or nest two to four objects.
- Throw and chase a ball.
- Turn the pages in my picture book.

Cognitively



The best way I learn is through play. The more I hear, see and do the more I will understand. Repeat, repeat, is my style. Doing things over and over again gives me confidence to master lots of skills even though I change from one activity to another fairly quickly.

I...

- fill a basket of goodies then dump everything out. I can also empty dresser drawers, kitchen cabinets and laundry baskets.
- play hide and seek -- it's fun to find things in different places.
- point to objects and things in picture books or when you name them.
- love for you to talk, read and sing to me.
- use a few words other than mama and papa.

As the days and months fly by I will be increasing my language skills. Use lots of gestures when you talk to me so I can understand more. Describe what you are doing, thinking or feeling in simple ways, for example, "it's time to cook." Talk to me about my own ongoing activities, for example, "Chris, I see you playing with your blocks." Yes, before long, if you keep doing these things, I'll figure out how to talk myself.

Socially



Sharing and helping are two social skills I can learn from you with lots of patience and love.

- **Talk** to me about what's mine and what's yours.
- **Share** your goodies with me; such as food, drink and other interesting items.
- **Encourage** me to pretend; such as sweeping, cooking, setting the table and doing other chores the way that you do.

Even though I want to play and explore, I want to know where you are at all times. I need that reassurance and sense of belonging. It's no fun playing in a room by myself. Showing off, getting attention and seeing you laugh when I put things on top of my head makes my day!

Emotionally



My emotions are constantly swinging back and forth. I can be:

- cooperative and loving.
- independent and stubborn.
- clingy (especially when I'm tired, sick or scared and need for you to comfort me).

Occasionally I want to show you how independent I am -- by doing what I want, not what you want me to do. I may scream and have a temper tantrum. Temper tantrums are quite normal for my age group. This is one way that I let out my frustration. I don't know how to express my feelings

with words. Don't bribe me to stop. As long as I'm not hurting myself, ignore me, don't react, and stay close.

Once I calm down, explain to me in short sentences why I got angry. You can help me practice expressing my feelings with words instead of with tantrums. Give names to my different feelings of anger, frustration, sadness, loneliness and happiness. The help and guidance you give me now will lay the groundwork for my healthy development.

Parents' Corner



Parenting a 12-18 month old is a very stressful challenge. You want to do the best job possible but sometimes you struggle with self doubt. It's ok, and it's natural. A child can bring lots of joy, but also lots of frustration. The cuddly baby of a few months ago has just become the little scientist who loves to explore and who can climb on, reach for, touch, throw, fall from or knock down many things. Your flexibility, patience and understanding will be tested. Your child's full time job will be testing the limits of his * power and the rules set by the family. If you are firm but loving, and don't give in to your child's every whim, you are on your way to forming a relationship of mutual respect. Your child will soon learn that even though he is valued, loved and his needs are important, the whole family is to be valued and loved as well.

Sometimes a child can push our buttons and we can react inappropriately. Yelling, screaming, name calling, put-downs and spanking can devastate a child's spirit. You are the most important person in your child's life and how you treat him will have a lasting impression. Here are some approaches to consider:

- You might count up to 10 or 100 before you act. If that doesn't work try putting your toddler in a safe place, such as a playpen. Tell him in simple words why he is being put there.

- In his book Raising a Happy Unspoiled Child, Dr. Burton White suggests that when a behavior simply becomes intolerable, install a gate in the doorway to a room. Put the child behind the gate and explain the reason for your action. The child might cry or look very unhappy because, although he can move about freely, he can't be close to you. After 20 to 30 seconds remove the gate and tell the child he can come back in the room, but if he continues his inappropriate behavior the gate will go up again.
- You can redirect him to a more appropriate activity.
- Practice giving your toddler choices. As your child develops his independence, give him opportunities to make decisions that will enhance his development. "Do you want to wear your yellow shirt or your green one?"

Now, when you want your child to do something, tell him what you want, don't ask. Say, "It's time to go to bed." Last but not least, love yourself as a parent. Forgive yourself for those times you overreact with your child. No one is perfect. Take time out. Respect yourself and pamper yourself once in a while. When you find yourself feeling resentful toward your children, it's time to take a break. There needs to be a balance in your life. By all means, don't be afraid to ask for help. If you're a single parent, ask family members, friends or neighbors to help. Don't try to do it by yourself. It's almost impossible. Remember, treat yourself and your child with tender, loving care!

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*Tots In Action uses "he," "his" and/or "him"
to represent toddlers of both genders to avoid
confusion.