

PARENTING INFANTS AND TODDLERS TODAY

Young Children's Social–Emotional Development: Key Findings From a 2009 National Parent Survey

Findings from a national survey of 1,615 parents of children from birth to 3 years, recently conducted by Hart Research for ZERO TO THREE, reveal that parents don't fully understand how deeply babies' and toddlers' social–emotional development is affected by their early experiences. This resource is designed to provide important information about how social–emotional development unfolds and what you can do to nurture your child's healthy development.

Key Findings

Young Children's Ability to Experience Feelings Such as Sadness and Fear

Although a robust body of research shows that babies as young as 6 months can experience a range of feelings, including sadness and fear, a large majority of parents (69%) think this developmental milestone occurs later in a young child's life.

What it means for you

Early experiences matter:

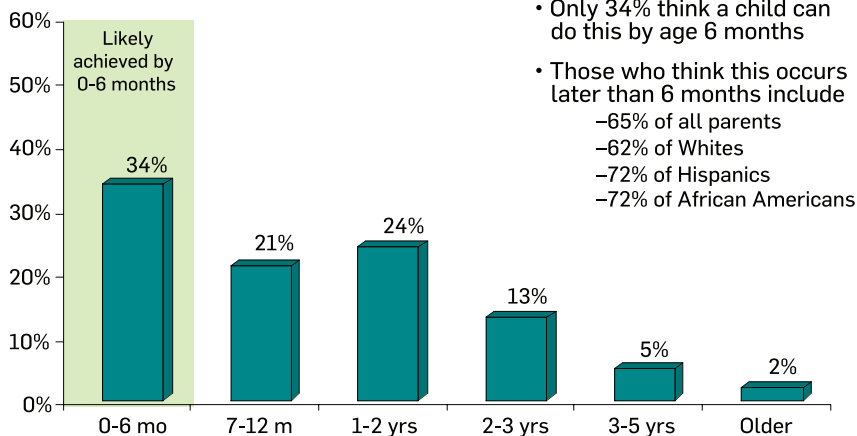
- Be a careful observer. Read your baby's cues and respond sensitively. For example, if he arches his back and turns away, he is likely telling you he is overwhelmed and needs a break and wants to be soothed.
- Be protective of your baby and keep her safe. Avoid situations that might be scary, such as being exposed to an argument or overstimulating environments like loud, crowded places (especially if your child is particularly sensitive and reactive to sensory experiences).
- Routines are very important and make young children feel safe and secure. Therefore, limit significant changes in his world as much as possible.

To read more about the emotional life of babies and how you can support their healthy early development, go to: www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/ffn_-_socemot_-_o12_-_par.pdf?docID=6661

Young Children's Ability to Sense and Be Affected by Parents' Moods

From birth, babies sense and react to their parents' moods, such as being angry or sad. Although 34% of parents appreciate that a young child can begin to sense and be affected by their parents' moods

Child Begins to Sense if Parents Are Angry or Sad and Can Be Affected by This



by the time they reach 6 months, two thirds of parents do not fully understand that babies can be affected in this critical way at such a young age.

What it means for you

It is very important to know yourself and to tune in to your feelings. Feelings are not right or wrong. Like most parents, you often have tender, loving feelings about your child, but sometimes your child may exhaust, frustrate, or anger you. You may be sad, angry, or stressed about something else you are coping with, such as problems at work, conflict with a spouse or partner, or the loss of someone close to you. Being aware of your feelings allows you to manage them in a way that protects your child from being negatively affected.

For tools and information that help you tune in to and manage your feelings and reactions, go to: www.zerotothree.org/powerofthepast



National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

To view the full report, go to: www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey

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Development of Young Children's Self-Esteem

Research shows that most children are capable of feeling good or bad about themselves—the early roots of their emerging self-esteem—between ages 1 and 2. Although 43% of parents think that a child is capable of such feelings by age 2, a majority of them (53%) do not think a child can experience these feelings until they are older.

What it means for you

The early years can be challenging. On the one hand, you give your toddler lots of love and affection, and you delight in sharing all her new discoveries. On the other hand, you need to set limits. This is one of a parent's most important responsibilities, because toddlers are naturally very curious and eager to explore everything, and this sometimes can lead to trouble. To learn about ways to teach your child self-control while nurturing her self-confidence and positive sense of herself, go to:

www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_social
www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_socemottips

Young Children's Ability to Control Emotions

Between the ages of 3 and 5, most children develop the capacity to control their emotions; for instance, asking for help when frustrated rather than having a tantrum. Although slightly more than one in three parents hold this expectation, a significant proportion of parents expect a young child to be capable of exerting this kind of self-control at a much younger age. Forty-three percent of parents believe that children can control their emotions by age 3, and 20% expect this by age 2.

What it means for you

Having appropriate expectations for your toddler's ability to manage his emotions and control his feelings and desires is very important. Although the behavior will probably still be challenging, having the insight that your child is reacting in a way that is to be expected for his age is important for you to understand. It can reduce stress for both you and your child and can help you respond most effectively to your child's behavior.

To learn about how young children develop self-control and what you can do to nurture this important skill, go to the following Web sites:

Developing self-control from 0–12 months

www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_selfcontrol012

Developing self-control from 12–24 months

www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_selfcontrol1224

Developing self-control from 24–36 months

www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_selfcontrol2436



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