

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the Toddler Program!! Whether you are new to the SPC or your child is graduating from the infant program, we'd like to prepare you for life in the toddler program.

Having reached many physical, cognitive and social milestones in the first year and a half, toddlers now embark on the journey to interact independently in their society and environment. They are refining theories about people, places and situations. They are formulating independent thoughts and trying to communicate personal wants, needs and ideas. They seek power and control of their own and are resistant to authority. To make matters worse, their lack of language skills is enough to make any exhausted, emotional toddler collapse in tears- kicking and screaming with frustration.

Toddlers are constantly learning and testing new rules of social behavior, interpersonal relationships, personal interactions and personal expression. Imagine that your child is writing a dissertation. Researching a topic and gathering information to support a theory. How will mom/dad react if melt down in the middle of the store? At the post office? In the bank? At church? What power do they have to stop, change or impact my behavior? Every outing provides an opportunity to experiment or test a theory. YOU are the science project. By giving them consistent reliable data they are able to reach early conclusions. But give inconsistent data, and they are forced to do more research. They will test and retest and retest their theories. Inconsistency and lack of guidelines actually prolongs the process of gathering research.

Ever wonder how those teachers control the classroom all day? How do they get all those kids to sleep at the same time anyway? Why don't the kids melt down at school like they do at home? One possibility is that the kids are on their best behavior at school—they save the emotional melt downs for the people they love and trust the most. Another possibility is that the routine is maintained everyday without exception. The expectations are the same, rules are well stated and enforced. Consider these suggestions in helping your child through the toddler years.

1. Have high expectations for your child. They are very capable people.
2. Prepare them for events by talking about them before hand. Many tantrums could be avoided by simply communicating intentions and expectations before a crisis begins.
3. Follow through. If you do not follow through with your request or statement, they will soon learn that you don't mean what you say.
4. The 4 F's. Think fast, be fair and act firmly when faced with a challenging situation. Oh, and don't forget to follow through.
5. Help them learn about self control. During the toddler years, children are developing lifelong skills to deal with anger, frustration, disappointment, sadness, etc. Model good emotional skills for them. (I love Daddy but I am angry with him, I'm frustrated with mommy and I'd like some time alone to calm down). Give them personal space and time to work through their anger and frustration. Try not to reason with them while they are crying —would you try to talk rationally to a ranting and raving adult?
6. They are good listeners...even if they pretend not to be listening you. If they over hear conversations about themselves/their teachers/their fears/their behaviors they will realize that your doubt and concern warrants additional research in that area. Therefore, try not to overreact to their emotions, food jags, transitional behaviors, etc. Many of these normal Toddler behaviors will pass quickly unless they are reinforced.

Some additional requests for the strength of the program....

Good communication between teacher and parent encourages strong foundations between home and school. Active parent involvement has been proven to reduce child aggression and behavior problems, enhance learning, and create a stronger value for education. Our Toddler program is one of your child's first "school" experiences, so we'd like to encourage you to begin good habits of parent involvement now. Talk to your child's teacher and read the parent board daily. Ask your child direct questions about the theme and activities posted on the board.

We ask that you notify the teachers of any concern, issue or happening that effects the child. Illness, antibiotic treatment, new living arrangements or conditions are all things the teacher should be aware of. Each of these directly involves your child's temperament and should be discussed with your teacher.

We hope that you feel at home in the classroom and take time to check diaper and wipe supplies, and check your child's cubby daily. It is difficult for us to track down every parent reminding them to bring gloves, sign paperwork, etc. Meeting the ever changing needs of 8 kids and their families is challenging for us and we appreciate your effort to stay on top of things.

As we move through the year and your child gets older we will begin to introduce skills like Potty learning, drinking from cups without lids, following simple directions, and logical consequences related to behavior. Each of these skills will be more easily learned if the expectations are consistent between home and school.

As a rule we limit the use of pacifiers, and cuddly blankies to nap time. During the first weeks, time with a comfort item may be allowed as your child adjusts to the center. Bottles will not be offered at any point of the day.

Please be sure your child has appropriate clothing for both indoor and outdoor activities. The clothes should be changed as your child grows and as the seasons change. Gloves are crucial in cold weather. Jackets and coats to preferred to snow suits.

Late arrival is sometimes a problem. One reason is because parents allow their child to sleep in. While we feel you inherently have your child's needs in mind, it is in actuality less beneficial to allow the extra sleep time. Allowing a child to sleep in till 9 then arriving at school at 10, only to be offered lunch and afternoon naps at 12 does not present much balance to his/her day. We will make an extra effort to allow the child time to make up for lost sleep during the day. Breakfast is served at 8:45. If you will arrive after 9:00 please be sure your child has eaten. If you arrive after 9:00 and the class has left for a walk or outing, you will not be able to leave your child at the center until the class returns.

We hope to have discipline efforts consistent between home and school. To allow the children some power and control over their activities we offer choices when available. However, if a child acts out defiantly, dangerously or angrily, or when the child is in melt down mode for any other reason, we use two types of "discipline". One type is "self discipline" where the child is in control of his own discipline. The mattress is used as a designated space to regain composure and rejoin the group whenever he is in control. The second discipline is the adult directed "Time out". The teacher removes the child from the activity or situation for a set amount of time in order to take away the child's privileges. The child may get up from the Time Out when the adult says and usually after the rules are restated. Timeout is generally never longer than 2-3 minutes.