Season Two Introduction

Hi, welcome to season two of the Baby Manual podcast for parents of toddlers. This season will help you feel confident as you navigate the difficulties of toddlerhood, from tantrums to sleep schedules to potty training.

I'm your host, a pediatrician and mom, Dr. Carol Keim. Hello and welcome to the fifth episode of Second Season Baby Manual Podcast. This is for your child who's two and a half years old.

Oh my goodness, aren't they so cute at this age? I just love it. From a social standpoint, a lot of babies at his age, I guess young children now, are starting to do some imaginary play.

Social and Language Development at 2.5

So you might see them presenting and it's really cute. They also like to say, look at me to their parents and show off what they're able to as they are getting their new skills.

They're starting to play with others a little bit more. At age two, they're doing that parallel play where they are just playing next to somebody. And you'll notice by two and a half that they start to interact a bit and wanting to see what the other person's reaction is.

It's pretty sweet. They can usually put two to three words together at a time and their speech is still only about 50% intelligible to strangers. A lot of times they will make mistakes with pronunciation and grammar.

And one way to help them at this age is actually to repeat back what they said but with correct grammar, even though it's super cute and you're probably going to want to just copy what did because it is adorable.

They actually learn a little bit faster if you repeat the right pronunciation in grammar And then they can usually use pronouns correctly at this age, which is really cool.

That's something they were not able to do by age two. Many children will be starting preschool at his age and you should expect them when, when they do start preschool or if they're in daycare, they will play with other children, but they should not yet be able share or take turns.

that comes a little bit later. So they may be trying to pull things out of other's children's hand. Other children might pull out their hands. they might try to yell or scream or kick or bite or push to get their way.

And that's because their vocabulary just isn't fully there yet to explain that they're frustrated. That's what happens when they get mad and frustrated, so some of that is normal to a degree.

It can help a little bit to tell them what's okay to do when their frustrated but usually at this age, the talking through things just doesn't really stick.

just sort of expect that they're playing with others, interacting with, others but not necessarily learning to be a good friend yet. They might start following older children around and copycatting them and so that can be good at, you know, mixed preschools where they have older age children that, they can kind of have some role models to model their behavior after.

And the main types of preschool we have in the US, and I'm going to do a full episode on preschools a little bit later, but we've got Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia.

And I talk about these a bit more in my two-year-old episode as well, which was two back.

Motor Skills and Independence

So I am not going through it again here. We'll wait for that preschool episode to come out. All right, so for motor skills at age two and a half, they can stab foods with a fork.

So they were able to use a spoon at the age of two, now they could use forks too. It's pretty cool. They can't always get it into their mouth and they usually still make a mess while they're eating.

But you can let them start practicing, especially with kid forking or plastic fork at this age where they really can hurt themselves with them. They can also start to walk upstairs alternating feet.

So a two-year-old will do like a step together, step-together kind of walk. At two and a half, they're starting to alternate feet, which is really a fun skill to watch happening.

They usually run well without falling down and tripping. You might notice that too they were trippin' and falling a lot, even though they we're running.

Now they can usually run pretty well and pretty consistently. They can also wash and dry their hands. So they should have all the skills necessary to turn water on and off and wash their all sides, all surfaces of their hand and dried them off as well.

And they usually catch a big object like a beach ball or a stuffed animal that you toss to them lightly underhand. Usually they'll start with their hands sticking out already and then they can catch it.

They're often not quick enough to go from hands at the sides to catching quite yet. All right, for behavior at this age, it's a little tricky sometimes.

I know they're starting to test boundaries and starting set their own boundaries, and sometimes wanting things that they can't have that are just unreasonable.

So ways that you can help with their behavior, at his age. Notice the good behavior. Things that their doing. Wow, I see that picked up all of your toys.

You just put all those toys into that bin. And also making things into a game. Let's see who can put the blocks away the quickest. Let's see who can put away the most of these.

They love those kind of things at this age. And then also offering two reasonable choices as often as possible.

Behavior Strategies and Routines

Like, do you want this spoon or this Spoon? Even if they look the same to you, they're going to have a preference. This cracker or This Cracker? Oh, you do want it on the side of the plate or in the middle of a plate?

like little tiny things that you might not even think to ask about. Try to slow the day down and think anything you can make into a choice, make it into choice.

Because the more choices your child has, and again, just two options at a time, but the times they get to make a choose, the they feel in control of their lives and the less likely they are to have these meltdowns where they're just feeling totally out of control and helpless.

That's one of the best things you can do with their behavior. The other thing is, if you set aside 10 minutes, which is not very long, just 10 to do completely child-directed play with them, that can make a huge change in their behaviour as well.

So put your phone away across the room, spend 10 sitting on the floor with your child, doing whatever they want to

be doing, and that's, they can go really far in helping with the behaviour and connecting with him also.

For parenting stuff, a couple other things, make sure you're maintaining routines around meals and bedtime at this age. And they start to notice that consistency and they also start trying to test it.

So, you know, things like bedtime, they might start suddenly thinking, oh, I'm hungry. I need to get out of bed to eat. Oh, I am thirsty. What things is mom gonna let me get outta bed?

Try to stay really consistent with meals and bedtimes and other routines so that they get to know what's actually expected. It's a great time to have fun outings together, like going to the museum, the zoo, or the library.

Walking around in nature, walking around downtown and just, you know, singing, talking together. Exploring together talking about all the stuff you see around you.

And their, their language is just exploding at this age and they can take in so much. So they just love learning about the world at age two and a half.

Try to limit TV time to one hour of high quality programming, and you should be watching it together ideally with them. And high-quality shows, I really like the PBS Kids shows.

Things like Daniel Tiger, Sesame Street, Peg Plus Cat, you know, they're all like really nice educational and just kind of sweet programs. They might be old enough also for like a couple of Netflix shows, Pocoyo is a cute one.

Poco is just a little boy that's learning about like words and vocabulary and stuff. And then also Octonauts is good teaching one that they sometimes like at this age.

Baby Bus is mostly music.

Screen Time and Nutrition

So yeah, there's a few options out there, but something that you're able to watch with your child together is the best. Then if you can like talk about it afterwards too, so that your interacting and not just having them like the screen as a babysitter basically.

Try to avoid screen time during meal times and also in the bedrooms. Those are bad habits and really slippery slopes. Yeah, just having the TV in living room and only using it at specified times for limited amounts of times is the healthiest way to teach your child to use screen-time.

And then be aware of your own screentime use around your children. So try not to be on your phone when they're falling asleep, for example, or when you're in a tub, you need to fully focus on them and not on the device.

For nutrition at this age, they start to go through this pattern where either they'll be grazing a little bit throughout the day and not really eating meals, or they might eat one meal, skip one, meal and pick at one.

So you might see that sort of weird eating pattern and that's pretty normal. They do outgrow that and they started to typically get picky around this as well.

A lot of children at age two and a half, have very firm opinions about what they will and will not eat. And a lot times it's just cheese. or just beige foods like chicken nuggets and toast or pancakes or oatmeal, things that are pretty colorless.

So make sure that you're offering at every meal at least half a plateful of veggies or fruits. And that'll just kind of keep those good habits going. This is going to keep showing up.

There's always going be something healthy with there. If you give them that fruit or veggie option along with

whatever else their preferred food is, They will pick at things that are on their plate typically.

So just keep that options available because I know it's super easy just to be like, okay, nuggets and french fries. I knew you're going to eat it and just fall into that trap day after day.

Just keep offering the healthy options alongside and they will at some point eat them. Potty training. Kids at this age that are potty-training will usually need to go pretty frequently throughout the day.

Expect at least, or well, up to 10 times per day and try to keep them relaxed during potting time by singing to them or reading a book. playing with a toy, something fun on the toilet because they don't often want to sit there, they want get back to playing and that can lead to constipation where, you know, if they're just like, oh, I'll just poop next time, it's fine.

Then the poop gets hard and then they wanna withhold it the next and it gets worse.

Potty Training and Safety

So letting them sit their long enough to poop if need to every time they use the potty is a great habit to get into. and then teach them to wash their hands with soap and dry them with a towel.

And you should start dressing them in clothing that's easy for them get out of when they do need to use the toilet, because they want to start to be more independent with that at this age.

In order to fully independent they need be able to get their clothes off and on, and also get on and off of the toilets. So they may still need your help at that age for many of those stages of potty training.

For safety at two and a half, their car seat can be forward facing, but also if they still fit in it rear facing for the height and weight limits of the carseat, rear-facing is safer as long as possible.

But a lot of two-and-a-half-year-olds are forward- facing now. You should be using a helmet for anything that has wheels. So if they have a scooter, a bike, you know, tricycle, skateboard, roller skates, make sure they had their helmet on for everything with wheels, it's a good habit to get into for safety for when they get older.

If you have any firearms in the home, ideally remove them from the house, but also if you do need to keep them in a safe that is locked and keep the ammunition separate, don't make sure that they stay unloaded.

Don't keep ammunition in them because those can cause unintentional injuries in children and in family members. Also, if you are smoking, try not to do that in front of your child.

Try to to it outside, partly for the risk of secondhand smoke, but also because they will pick up cigarette butts on the floor and put them in their mouth.

And you don't want them doing that when you guys are out in public. That can cause some serious germs. Yeah. Make sure you're supervising them closely around dogs and also in parking lots and around cars, because they don't have that awareness yet.

At this age, a lot of times, if they see a dog, they'll just go for it to pet it and they might get bitten. And, you know, with cars they realize that cars won't always stop for them because I can't see them.

So they may just walk out in front of cars. Also, they don't have any fear around bodies of water typically at this age. And so you need to be within arm's reach.

So like able to just reach out and touch them at any second if they are near water. That's like pools, lakes, streams, bathtubs, toilets. Children can fall into a toilet head first and they can slip even while they're in the bathtub.

They can sleep and go under the water and drown within seconds. You need be right next to them, watching them closely anytime there's a body of And you can't rely on those floaties or tubes or anything for safety.

They're never 100% safe. So you need to be right there next to them. And yeah, like in the pool with them if they are in a pool. For their two and a half year old checkup, they typically aren't getting vaccines at this age unless they're due for a flu or COVID vaccine.

It is okay to allow your child to sit on the table and answer questions. Keep in mind that they might feel nervous or they may give wrong answers at this age and that's pretty normal.

So you may need to be helping with answering questions that the doctor asks. They're usually comfortable with the physical exam portion and not very shy about their bodies yet.

Checkups and Closing Advice

And just talk to your doctor if you have any specific questions about things like preschool or behavior, temper tantrums, nutrition, whether your child is getting a good enough variety of foods, or whether they need to do any vitamins or supplements.

You can ask your Dr. about potty training questions, constipation, and also about sleep routines or any other questions that you might have. And just a reminder, they should be going to the dentist once or twice per year, so they're probably due for another dentist visit.

And if anyone in the family wears glasses and they have not yet been to an ophthalmologist or eye doctor, you can get them tested at any time after their first birthday.

Just call the eye-doctor and see if they will see children because most of them do have machines that the child just has to look in and you don't even necessarily have to cooperate or know their letters or numbers or anything yet.

So they can test them earlier at the eye doctor. All right, I hope this is helpful. Your next couple of checkups will be at age three and then age four.

Starting at three, we just do annual check-ups in children. Isn't that amazing? And the next routine vaccines are going to be age 4. Right, hang in there.

I know two and a half can be tricky, but you've totally got this. And sometimes it gets worse before it get better. So tune in again for the three-year-old checkup when we talk about all the excitement that comes with three year olds.

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