

Curriculum overview for toddlers

Note: this curriculum has been written to support toddlers aged approximately 1 – 2 years.

The curriculum is your plan – Ofsted calls the curriculum your ‘intent’. It covers the things you want babies and children to experience, learn and enjoy doing through their early years. Intent is everything you do up to the point of teaching. The early years curriculum, which is statutory in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2021) educational programmes, covers the 7 areas of learning including:

- **Communication & language:** interactions; exploring language; listening and understanding.
Toddlers will be listening to everything that is happening around them and starting to use new words and phrases, as long as they hear quality language from adults and other children. Engage them and develop their vocabulary through books, songs, rhymes, stories and daily conversations.
- **PSED:** emotions; sense of self; relationships.
As toddlers develop a sense of self and a strong will and determination, they might have tantrums and struggle with their emotions. Practitioners will need to manage this sensitively, while using teachable moments to share information about how they can express themselves calmly. Secure boundaries will help them to enjoy their play in the setting.
- **Physical development:** core strength and coordination; gross motor skills; fine motor skills.
Toddlers will be starting to move – often at speed – and will want to explore the environment. Providers need to ensure robust risk assessment supports their explorations. Opportunities for mark making and sensory exploration should build on their previous experiences.
- **Literacy:** comprehension; pre-reading; pre-writing.
Reading and mark making should be fun – as toddlers explore books, songs, rhymes, stories etc they will develop a love of reading which will sustain them for life.
- **Mathematics:** numbers; spatial reasoning; patterns and connections.
As you explore the world together, toddlers will start to use numbers in their play and notice changes which will help them to develop an underpinning understanding of different maths concepts such as shape, size, capacity, speed, distance, symmetry, volume, weight etc. They will enjoy making comparisons and building their maths vocabulary through play.
- **Understanding the world:** personal experiences; diverse world; widening vocabulary.
Toddlers want to explore and get involved in the activities you provide for them. Think about how you can use books and storytelling to introduce new words which they will learn as they practice them during play.
- **Expressive art & design:** imagination & creativity; self-expression; communicating through the arts.
Encourage toddlers to be messy and to enjoy crafts and being creative. Do not ask them for an end-product – at this age, it’s about developing the skills they need to use in the future. Consider whether you want to use food for resources (maybe left-overs from meals) or non-food items – this will be an individual setting decision.

Communication and language – toddler

Interactions – activity ideas:

- Read books with every day – encourage listening and questioning to support understanding.
- Involve the child in cooking (real and pretend) – name and explore the ingredients.
- Ask parents to share favourite toys from home so you can talk about them in the setting.
- Take an interest in what the child is telling you – use visuals to support their communication.

Exploring language – activity ideas:

- Help the child notice pictures and words in books – use a finger to point at them and talk about them.
- Scaffold the child's words by adding new ones to help them make longer sentences.
- Comment rather than asking questions so the child hears quality language.
- Set up imaginative role play scenarios and enjoy playing together, taking turns and sharing.

Listening and understanding – activity ideas:

- Allow processing time – show child you respect them and let them find the words to think and answer.
 - Note and build on the child's current interests as well as introducing them to new things.
 - Play copying games with songs, musical instruments, environmental noises, actions and voices.
 - Toddlers can focus on simple instructions but they might need support from adults to help them.
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Personal, social and emotional development – toddler

Emotions – activity ideas:

- Set simple boundaries to keep the child safe – they provide a sense of security.
- Name the child's emotions: keep it simple to start with – happy, sad, angry.
- Play emotions games and model empathy when you are talking to the children or other adults.
- Teach consequences for actions during play – if you do that, then this will happen. Be consistent.

Sense of self – activity ideas:

- Talk to the child about body and name body parts when reading books and singing songs.
- Look at photos of how the child has grown – talk about the changes you can see.
- Encourage independence when getting dressed, tidying up and during daily routines.
- Plan time for child-initiated play every day – ensure the child can get to the toys they want to use.

Relationships – activity ideas:

- Check the child's levels of wellbeing and involvement regularly – see the Leuven Scales.
 - Show that you keep the child in mind when they are not there – have home conversations with them.
 - Build on any schema play you notice – rotation, transporting, lining things up, throwing etc.
 - Plan secure daily routines for the child to follow – offer choices about what they want to do next.
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Physical development – toddlers

Core strength – activity ideas:

- Encourage barefoot walking and running to develop balance and proprioception.
- Set up table play – take the chairs away to build upper body and core strength.
- Resource trikes and wheeled toys and take the child to parks if there isn't space in the garden.
- Dance to music the child hears at home and new songs in the setting – stand, squat, jump, hop.

Gross motor skills – activity ideas:

- Encourage walking, running, scooting, standing, rolling, pushing and pulling to develop stamina.
- Roll balls between you and play cooperatively, taking turns and using everyone's name.
- Resource for transporting play – boxes and bags and small toys to carry around and dump.
- Visit the park to use big play equipment which challenges the child's movement skills.

Fine motor skills – activity ideas:

- Provide dolls with clothes to undress – practice zippers, velcro, buttons etc.
 - Set out blocks, puzzles and play table games for the child to use – model use and support turn taking.
 - Develop pincer movements – threading, posting, small world, mark making on different surfaces.
 - Resource mark making – pencils, crayons, paints etc and different sizes, colours and shapes of paper.
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Literacy – toddlers

Comprehension – activity ideas:

- Read lift the flap books and noisy, sensory books together – get excited about the story.
- Introduce and repeat new words linked to the child's play and current interests.
- Resource cosy spaces for reading and chatting together – children need access to quiet places.
- Display books front facing and provide access to props to support the child's understanding of the story.

Pre-reading – activity ideas:

- Point to pictures and talk to the child about what they see in books – notice big / small things together.
- Expand the child's vocabulary during conversations – don't correct them, reframe and repeat.
- Teach new songs and rhymes – learn new ones together for the seasons, weather, time of year etc.
- Have fun using silly voices and puppets when telling stories and reading books.

Pre-writing – activity ideas:

- Resource daily sensory play – show the child how to make marks in the playdough, sand, gloop etc.
 - Set out a sand or water tray with interesting contents – pour, scoop, roll, push.
 - Sing finger songs and rhymes (number, shape) to develop hand strength and bilateral coordination.
 - Set up large scale mark making for the child to explore with friends.
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Mathematics – toddler

Number – activity ideas:

- Sing number songs and rhymes – learn some new finger plays – develop awareness of number.
- Read books about numbers and counting together.
- Use numbers in real life contexts – routines, counting steps and fingers, claps or jumps in a song.
- Spot numbers on outings – on doors, buses, signs, in shops.

Spatial reasoning – activity ideas:

- Resource block play and junk modelling – busy builders with tape measures and spirit level.
- Compare weight, height, size, shape in messy play and games.
- Resource shape sorters and peg jigsaws – show the child how they work.
- Set out the sand and water tray – experiment and investigate with different contents.

Patterns and connections – activity ideas:

- Put some patterned material in a basket – spots, stripes, gingham, repeating animal patterns.
 - Spot patterns on animals, notepaper, natural resources and wallpaper – point out patterns on clothes.
 - Draw and make repeating patterns – bottle tops; clap and stamp; pat-a-cake clapping games.
 - Put together collections of small world and natural resources when you go on walks.
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Understanding the world – toddlers

Personal experiences – activity ideas:

- Tell stories shared by parents about the child's home and family life.
- Read books about families – same as and different from the child's home life.
- Respond positively to the child's changing facial expressions and pointing, lifting arms to pick up etc.
- Sing songs and rhymes from the child's home and family life – ask parents to record new ones.

Diverse world – activity ideas:

- Talk to the child about how they are special and have their own interests.
- Plan outings into the local community to develop cultural awareness - make books about the local area.
- Ask parents for holiday photos so you can talk about what they enjoyed doing.
- Resource cause and effect toys with flaps and buttons.

Widening vocabulary – activity ideas:

- Read books from around the world together – talk about same and different.
 - Listen to music and talk about how it sounds – comment on whether it is fast, slow, loud, quiet etc.
 - Use new words and phrases regularly so the child hears and copies them.
 - Spot the child's current interests and build on them during play.
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Expressive arts and design – toddlers

Imagination and creativity – activity ideas:

- Tell stories imaginatively, using props and funny voices to engage the child.
- Play musical instruments from around the world – make a band.
- Plan outings into the local community to explore crafts – tree rubbing, sticks in the sand.
- Link activities to all the senses – share what you are doing with parents to support home learning.

Self-expression – activity ideas:

- Set up sensory play activities inside and larger-scale in the garden.
- Resource open-ended mark making fun.
- Paint with colours and texture – add sand to paint, use paint pens, blend colours.
- Draw and colour together – be mindful, putting on different types of music in the background.

Communicating through the arts – activity ideas:

- Resource sensory messy play – cloud dough, silly soap, cooked pasta, oats and water.
- Encourage the child to express their emotions through the arts – painting, drawing, dancing.
- Play music and give the child ribbons and scarves to use as they dance.
- Close your eyes and listen to music or environmental sounds together – talk about what you heard.

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Think about the individual child:

**Where does the toddler go on outings with their family – can you build on this in your activities?

**How does the toddler play – are they sensory learners or do they hang back?

**Does the toddler listen well when you have engaged their attention (using their name helps) – do you or parents have any concerns about their hearing?

**How does the toddler play with toys – are they showing you any schemas (repeated patterns of play) or personal interests which you can develop during their sessions?

**Does the toddler have any favourite books or songs at home which you can read or sing in the setting, to help them make connections between home / family and setting life?

**How does the toddler react to outings – do they stay nearby or do you need to use reins to keep them safe while they explore? Notice how they react to animals, birds, nature, changes in weather etc.

**Risk assess what toys, games and natural materials toddlers can access to ensure they do not choke on resources if they randomly still put things in their mouths.

**Are toddlers interested in your play invitations – how can you change them to capture their interests?

**Do they have any barriers to their learning – what can you do to support them?

Note: see ‘Quick Assessment Checks’ guide for tracking support if required for the individual child.