

VENTURING OUT

• **MOBILIZING.** Characterized by their new ability to **WALK** on their own, toddlers are consumed with exploring.

• **LEARNING TO SEPARATE.** A toddler's new ability to walk, however, is challenged by his dependence on his parents and the feeling of safety he gets from keeping them close. Balancing the need to become independent and returning to the safety of home base is a challenge both for toddlers and for their parents.

• **OVERFLOWING WITH NEWNESS.** A toddler can be overwhelmed by all the developments associated with his new discoveries and developing sense of self. And, his new awareness of language and feelings can lead to new fears—mistaking parents' disapproval, for example, with a loss of love.

• **DISCOVERING HIS BODY.** A toddler's new repertoire also includes learning about gender and controlling bodily functions.

? How does attachment progress?

In the first three years of life, experts believe that there are clearly defined shifts in the way that children understand themselves and create relationships with people and their environment. Each shift coincides with a leap in

	Birth → 2 months	2 months → 6 months	6 months → 12-15 months	12-15 months → 36 months
Your child is...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> concentrating on adapting to her new environment—she learns to regulate her eating and sleeping patterns. communicating—through crying, yawning and postures—your child teaches her parents how to care for her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more alert—he smiles, makes eye contact and deliberate sounds. showing excitement and can avert his gaze when the excitement is too high. using verbal and non-verbal cues to signal his needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sitting up and crawling—she can move away from and towards you. developing object permanence—she can find a hidden toy and knows that you exist even when she can't see you. showing growing attachment to her primary caregiver with displeasure when she leaves, and relief and pleasure when she returns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning to walk. He is curious and actively explores his world. capable of symbolic thought or pretend play.
You are...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning to understand your baby's signals and to respond appropriately. feeding your child when she is hungry, burping her when she has gas, comforting her when she is fussy, changing her when she is wet, keeping her safe and secure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> responding to your child's needs, playing games and interacting. becoming more attuned to his emotional signals and coping behaviors. differentiating between cries and knowing if your child is hungry or in pain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing a safe and loving environment that she can explore. comforting her when she is stressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emotionally available to your child. setting limits and allowing your child to explore his world, his autonomy and his emotions.
What's happening with the parent-child relationship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By two months, your child can engage and disengage you with her cries and glances. Your baby has developed her first relationship. She lets you know her needs and you respond to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You and your child are falling in love—through a process where he often initiates interactions and you try to understand his signals and needs. There are times when you will not “read” your child correctly. This is OK. Your baby is beginning to develop coping strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A meaningful relationship has formed between you and your child. Your child knows what to expect from you based on prior experiences. She also begins to become aware of her own behaviors and abilities. Your child often looks to her primary caregiver, usually her mother, for a sense of safety and security. She uses this person as a secure base, a trusted figure who provides comfort and love. Armed with trust and the confidence of a secure base, your child can explore her world and risk the bumps she encounters along the way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although excited by his exploration and autonomy, your toddler will also become overwhelmed and scared and will need to rely on you for comfort—he will often move away but then come back to the safety of being with you. Tantrums and power struggles may ensue as your toddler learns to use his own will. As you set limits and demonstrate that you will continue to love and care for your child, he will learn self-control and understand that he can “fall apart” and still survive and be loved.

How important is the parent-child relationship?

Building a healthy relationship through sensitive and responsive care—with an emotional investment—allows your child to feel safe and secure, provides him with a solid base for exploration and allows him to communicate his feelings.

Source: Fran Stott, PhD.

ACTION ITEMS

Tips for easing separation anxiety

- Say goodbye.** Waving bye-bye to your toddler is something you should not avoid doing. At first, this may make her cry, but, if you just disappear, and she thinks you might leave her at any time, she will cry and cling to you constantly.
- Prepare your child.** Talk to your child about what is going to happen to help him think ahead. You may think that he does not grasp what you are saying, but he understands much more than he can actually say.
- Be optimistic.** Do not let your apprehensions show when you are leaving your child. Show optimism by saying, “I think you are going to have a wonderful time playing with the other children today!”
- Provide a comfort object.** At first, when the anxiety is the strongest, you may want to allow your child to keep an object that will make her feel close to you. Examples: a stuffed animal or a pillow from her bed.
- Help label his emotions.** Even though it will be some time before your child starts to understand his emotions, you can label what he is feeling. When you are walking out the door and your child screams for you not to leave, explain that what he is feeling is “missing” you. Also, add that you have the same feeling, and you understand.
- Take things slowly.** When you are getting ready to go back to work after being with your child at home, it is a good idea to have a transition time with the new caregiver, your child and yourself. This gives everyone an opportunity to get acquainted and become comfortable with the new situation.
- Arrange same-time departures.** To make saying goodbye easier, try having your child exit first. When you drop her off at the nursery, have the caregiver take her outside to play. Be sure to wave bye-bye to her as she is leaving you.
- Employ favorite pastimes.** You might also like to have your child care provider involve your child in a favorite pastime. He may get upset when she sees you are leaving; however, it will be much easier for him to get re-involved in something he is already working on.
- Help her learn to deal with separation.** Eventually your child will learn how to cope and understand that she must be separated from you sometimes. This may take some time, but she must learn this important developmental task. She will use it for the rest of her life.