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Is Your 18-Month-Old on Track? Cognitive Milestones Between 1 and 2 Years



Judy Koutsky
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Your little one is learning lots between her first and second birthdays. Find out how your baby will change and grow during this stage.



Does it seem like your baby outgrows her clothes faster than you can buy them? Your 18-month-old is growing bigger by the day, and her cognitive abilities are developing just as quickly. Between the ages of 12-24 months, your baby is improving her comprehension, problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

Here are the cognitive milestones that she should be hitting by her second birthday and what you ([and your caregiver](#)) can do to encourage her development:

And read [our guide to developmental milestones for kids](#) .

Cognitive Achievements

Your 18-month-old should be able to point to various body parts. A way to encourage this is to ask her, "Where's your nose? Where is your belly? Your feet?" She should also be able to point to other objects to get your attention (pointing to the fridge if she wants a snack or to a cup if she wants some milk), according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP).

Your toddler is also becoming very independent, and the [AAP](#) points out that your child likes to be in charge of the action at this age. Making their own decisions helps children feel more confident and empowered, says [Dr. Nicole DeVincenzo Garcia](#), a pediatrician and new mom herself. She encourages parents to give their child two options and letting the child have the final say. "Just make sure the choices are OK with you. The options should be broccoli versus spinach, not broccoli versus ice cream," says Dr. Garcia. By presenting her with choices, you can let your baby take the lead while still staying in control.

If you give a simple direction like "kick the ball," your child should be able to respond correctly.

She may need you to use both words and gestures to get the point, but by 24 months, she should be able to understand directions with words alone. This includes getting things from another room. Encourage this by constantly interacting with your child -- ask questions like "Where's your truck? Is it in your room?" By 2 years old, she should be able to retrieve the objects.

Children at 12 to 24 months of age also understand the word "no" and can pick up on your tone of voice and facial expressions. "These are your tools with regards to establishing and reinforcing your limits," says Dr. Garcia. It also becomes important to be consistent in what you say and to avoid giving mixed signals. Saying "yes" one time and "no" the next is confusing for your baby. Make sure that you and your caregiver are on the same page in terms of snacks, nap time and other key points.

How to Help

This is an exciting time in your child's development, one where make-believe comes alive, notes [Dr. Gregory Finn](#), a board-certified pediatrician, assistant professor at [Washington University](#) and founder of Blue Fish Pediatrics. Encourage creative play by giving her blocks and other simple toys, which Dr. Finn explains will refine problem-solving skills as she finds solutions to playtime problems. Have tea parties, build forts, create a magical world of pirates and princesses -- you'll be surprised at how many wonderful scenes your child can create.

However, because communication and reasoning skills are still being worked on, she may become upset if she's misunderstood. It's important to remember that it's very common for your 18-month-old to have temper tantrums. "Tantrums at home should be ignored as much as possible. If a tantrum occurs in public, just remove the child from the situation as quickly as possible," explains Dr. Garcia. As your child's ability to communicate increases, her tantrums

should subsidize.

When it comes to milestones, remember that every child grows at his own rate. Your doctor should be measuring her developments at each wellness visit, but make sure you tell them of any concerns. Be assured, most kids are moving along at the right pace.

For more on developments, check out this [Overview of Milestones for 1 Year Olds](#).

Judy Koutsky is the former editorial director of KIWI Magazine, a green parenting publication. She was also executive editor of [Parenting.com](#), AOL On Parenting and BabyTalk. Follow her on [Twitter](#).

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