

transition time

How to help your toddler grow up - step by step

BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

TODDLERS — so little, so energetic and so temperamental — can seem like strangers to parents at times. However, Dr. Deb Moberly, an associate professor in the University of Missouri-St. Louis's early childhood division of teaching and learning, shared a point that can remind you that they're not all that different from adults:

"One of the first things to remember when introducing a new element to a toddler's routine is they do not like change," she notes.

Think about how changes throw you off, and then think about how, although it doesn't always feel like it, you actually have much more control over your life than a child and can see beyond yourself.

"Toddlers are egocentric, meaning, what they want and what they are doing or thinking about doing is the only way they see a situation. With this caveat in mind, moms should be aware of their toddlers' transitional warning signs that will help them ease their toddler's anxiety about change," she says. "Even then, moms know that crying and unhappiness in their toddler may still occur during the course of the transition."

Taking the steps necessary to grow-up won't be drama free, no matter what, but a number of tips can help you conquer each challenge a bit easier:

Tip number one: It is important for any young child to have one thing to adjust to at a time, Dr.

Moberly emphasizes. A new sibling, new babysitter and giving up a bottle all at the same time is a recipe for disaster. Tackle one transition, and you greatly improve your chances of "winning."

Tip number two: Let your toddler have a "lovey" anytime he or she wants one during the transitional period is beneficial and encouraged. This could be a blanket, doll or stuffed animal or any other item that brings your child comfort.

Tip number three (plus more how-to do advice!): Move from bottle to sippy cup slowly and by offering a choice, Dr. Moberly suggests encouraging your toddler to replace his bottle of milk with a small cup of milk as part of his regular bedtime routine, along with taking a bath, brushing his teeth and reading a book. Deborah Gilboa, a doctor from Pittsburgh, Pa who helps parents in person and through her website, www.AskDoctorG.com, recommends a switcheroo: "The easiest way to help toddlers make transitions is to link the new item or behavior

to something that toddler values. Giving up the bottle is best accomplished if only water is allowed in the bottle," she says. "If the kiddo wants milk or juice, it needs to be in a cup. Want the bottle? No problem — here is some water!"

Tip number four (plus): According to Rebecca Michi, a children's sleep consultant from Seattle, Washington, you should wait until your child is at least 12 months old and maybe starts climbing out of the crib before considering a big-kid bed. Once you decide to make the change, get your child involved

in the process: Have him help pick out the bed and the sheets, and let him play on the bed for awhile. Suggest he place some stuffed animals on it. It's ideal if the bed can be placed in the same room as the crib during the transition period. You can ask if he'd like to spend the night in the bed right away, but if not, try naps for a few days and then ask again about the night. If he decides to try it out for a sleep, put up the guard rail or place pillows on the floor, preventing or softening any falls. He'll most likely get out of bed and come to you - maybe even often! - and you'll have to dig up every ounce of patience you have. Michi says to gently repeat, "It's nap time" or "it's night time," and lead him back to bed, saying nothing more and not engaging in any discussion.

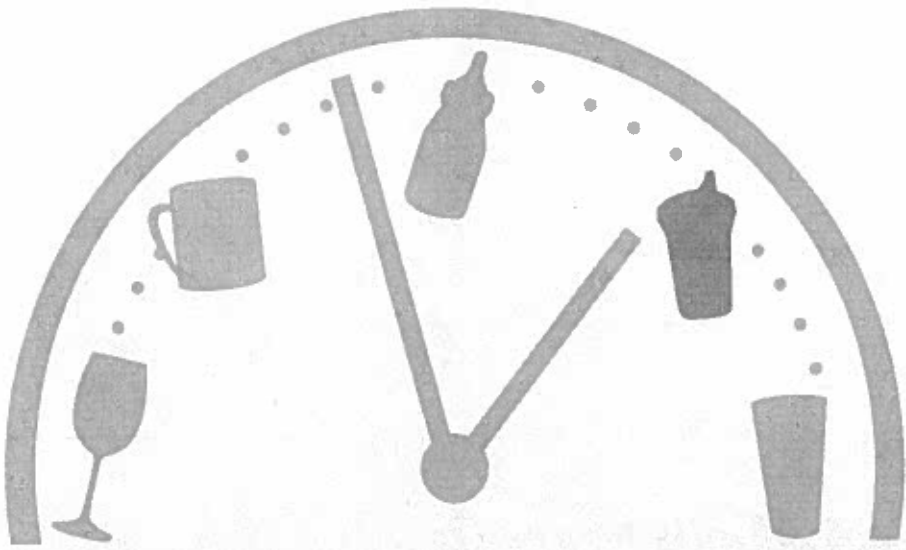
Tip number five (plus): Think

about how you'd feel. Gigi Schweikert, author of the *Winning Ways for Early Childhood Professionals* book series and *Prime Times: A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddlers Programs*, asks parents this: "How would you feel if your spouse brought home a new wife or husband with the explanation, 'I love you so much. You have made such a positive difference in my life that I wanted another one like you.'" That's kind of how first children can feel with the arrival of a new sibling, she says. Her ideas for "softening the blow" include: Tell your child about the pregnancy and the new baby. You don't want your child to overhear the news from someone else. Include your child in the pregnancy, listening to the heartbeat or seeing an ultrasound, will make the experience more real. Talk about the new baby, but phrase your comments to focus on your child: "You're going to be a big brother when the baby comes." "You can hand me the diapers when the baby arrives." Attribute your physical limitations to your body and not the new baby: "Mommy can sit on the floor and play with you, but I can't pick you up because my back hurts," instead of "I can't pick you up because of the baby." Make developmental changes regarding your child before the baby comes. If you need the crib for the new baby, move your toddler to a big

Books about adjusting to a new baby

- ***We Have a Baby*, by Cathryn Falwel**
Simple text and illustrations. What can you do with a new baby?
- ***The New Baby*, by Fred Rogers**
For toddlers and preschoolers. Nice photos of families working together and sharing.
- ***Our New Baby*, by Wendy Cheyette Lewison.**
Great photos and simple text for very young children.

—suggested by Gigi Schweikert



boy bed because he's a big boy and not because the baby needs it. Once your new baby arrives, remember to continue being sensitive. Sibling rivalry can kick into place earlier. Soften it by showing your child pictures of his own "babyhood" to illustrate the love and attention you gave him when he was an infant. Tell him stories about all the baby things he did. Keep any negative comparisons to yourself. Every child is different. It's actually amazing that two children born of the same parents could be so different without having been switched at birth. Try to understand rather than compare and judge. Make special dates with your child and try to keep his schedule as consistent as possible. Integrate your child in the care routine of the infant. Make one of the baby's daytime naps a special time to spend with your other child. During at least two feedings a day, have your child join you to read a book or go over homework. Ask close friends and family to bring a small gift to the sibling or take him out for time alone with you.

Tip number six (plus): No one will ever make your child as happy as you, but the time might come when you need to hire a nanny or sign up for daycare. Your child can be almost as involved as you in the process, just make it a slow, gradual one. Candi Wingate, president of Nannies4Hire, a national company headquartered in Nebraska,

offers the following recommendations: Have your child meet your prospective nannies or babysitters during their interviews. Watch how your child and the candidates relate. After each interview, ask your child how she liked each candidate. On the caregiver's first days of employment, pop in at home and spend some time there unexpectedly. Take that opportunity to observe how things are going between your child and the new nanny. Provide feedback to your child and your new sitter. For example, tell her, "I saw that you put Chris down for a nap without his bear. He really likes to have his bear when he naps. You can find his bear in location." Another example: Tell your child, "Jane, (the new nanny), is not the same as Kitty (the prior nanny). Jane doesn't know what you're used to, just like Kitty didn't when she started. Have some patience and tell Jane what you want." If you're looking at a daycare center or pre-school, get ready to invest a bit of time: Dr. Moberly says you and your toddler should attend the preschool together for the first time, participating in all of the activities together. She suggests leaving conversations about your child with the teacher and director for another time. Your child should find out where the bathroom is; where he plays outside; what will happen if he gets hurt. Ask the teacher to spend one-on-one time with your toddler with you there.

If you decide to move forward with a place, your child's first few visits without you should be short, then increased in length. What is frequently seen in toddlers starting the day at preschool are tears when a parent leaves, then the child usually starts playing and stops crying. Kathleen Hayes, editor of *Highlights High Five* magazine, advises against sneaking away. Make sure you say good-bye and give your child concrete information about when and who will come back, she says. Be specific, along the lines of, "I'll be back after you have snack." "Papa will come to get you after lunch." Not knowing how or when you left and when you will come back can create a great deal of uncertainty and fear. Help him or her by handing over a photograph to keep in a safe place at school. A visual reminder of the people your child loves best can help ease the loneliness. Or give your child a scarf or some other small object that belongs to you. They can hold it and smell it when they need a reminder of you.

Tip number seven: Show your love, hide your other emotions. Dr. Moberly reminds us that toddlers are sensitive to what their parents are feeling. Be careful, she says: Even your nonverbal expressions and nervousness will be identified during a transition and may influence their behavior and feelings. If ever there was a time to play it cool, "transition time" is it.

One Chesapeake mom's advice

Monica Vollmer, mom to 6-year-old Kendall and 4-year-old Morgan, reports that you can survive all the toddler transitions. Here's how she did it, along with Husband Mick:

"With Kendall, we started talking about how Morgan would be coming home, which meant she, Kendall, was going to be the big girl and big sister now. We kept talking to her about being in a big girl bed, and at first she didn't care too much, but the more we talked about it the more involved she got. I'd ask her questions about what she thought her big girl room would look like. She said "pink and purple with lots of butterflies." That was all I needed to know. At the beginning of July (Morgan was due in mid-December, September), we closed the door to the room she would be moving into and left her in what's now Morgan's room in the crib. Kendall was almost 2. We worked really hard (while I'm pregnant with Morgan!) to get this new big girl room done for her 2nd birthday. We wanted to make sure she had time to get comfortable with her new room and make it more about her getting big and the "baby" needing the crib. The morning of her 2nd birthday, we got her up and told her she could finally open the door, that her birthday present was in there. When she opened the door, she put both hands on her cheeks and screamed, "Oh my goodness" and immediately began inspecting her new room, which included testing out

how well she could bounce on the bed. It was a huge hit, and she never asked to go back into the other room again.

As we continued getting ready for Morgan, we let Kendall be a part of picking out the new decorations, comforter set, and clothes for her. She was always so excited to help, and it made her feel like she was going to be a big sister, and her new baby sister would love her so much for helping.

For their childcare, we had nannies for both girls until they were about 18 months. We went through a heavy screening process, lots of interviews and background checks. Both nannies started while I was still out on maternity leave. We did this so I could watch them with the girls; so they could learn our expectations; and so the girls could start forming a relationship with the nanny. We did this for about a month before I went back to work each time. Adjusting to pre-school was probably the hardest, but mostly on me! We again went to several child care places and checked references of other parents who had kids there, along with checking out any reports against them with the Better Business Bureau and Social Services. Once we identified a school, we started them slow. We kept the nanny on each time, but cut hours back as we took them in for a couple hours at a time, two to three times a week for about two weeks. It wasn't perfect, but they started fulltime after those two to three weeks.