

## The Toddler World

Every child is born with his/ her unique potential, and can bloom to become a lovely individual, if tended in the right manner from the time of birth through the early childhood years. A toddler, in most cases, is considered to be someone who needs to be taken care of by the parent or care-giver. With increasing work pressure or demands of the society that need to be fulfilled, some parents ignore the need of personal care, quality time, love, care and comfort that a child needs for enabling him to grow up well. Many of us are still not aware of the importance of an enriched environment that is necessary for a toddler to allow him/ her to create a link to reach out to his world in his own way. And this is most important in this age group (2-6 years) as, it has been discovered through research that the first six years of one's life is significant for the brain to develop fully.

For a child to be nurtured into being a healthy individual, it is very important to create an environment that has the potential to enrich the child by stimulating his/her senses. The child needs to be able to experiment in a surrounding that is free from competition or stress, allowing him/ her to interact and socialise with other children, to develop independence and to explore things and assess the outcomes of their actions. The child should be exposed to many activities that allow him/ her to be an active participant and hence generate the interest to learn by exploring. Thus, it is pertinent that the parent or care taker of the child give him/ her adequate positive experiences in the early years, by enabling social interaction and development of sensorial awareness.

It has been seen that in most cities and towns, there are a number of early childhood education centres, which is generally called a pre-school. A pre-school refers to an early childhood educational class that cater to the toddlers and kindergarteners (2 to 5 years old) and concentrates in their holistic (all round) development. The basic need of a child is to involve itself with the new things in the surroundings, to see, touch and feel (sensorial awareness) through free play. A pre-school curriculum is based on play way method of learning (knowing through play) and it creates an aesthetically pleasing environment that includes hygiene and appropriate furniture, play equipments, teaching apparatus and facilitators(educators/ mentors) who allow the child- freedom of choice, to act independently and to enable the child to decide things for his/ herself. The role of a facilitator is mainly to usher and generate interest in the child through the eyes of the child and to guide them gently.

The language abilities of a child, include speaking, sight reading, expression, vocabulary, and is very important to enhance their ability of understanding communication through speech by using body language and gestures and by understanding what others say. It may be done by involving the child in story-telling sessions, to introduce phonic sounds and to converse with them, besides practising the age specific curriculum ie: introducing them to the alphabets etc. The child may be encouraged to repeat a story narrated by the facilitator, in simple language and in this process the child is able to shake away the initial hesitation, is able to communicate. The story telling sessions should be made interesting by using puppets, flash cards and a lot of voice modulation and different kind of sounds should be made, in order to hold the

attention of the child, as children of this age group has very little attention span.

To explore the creative abilities of a child, one needs to allow free expression. The child should be exposed to colouring and drawing, other activities involving creative ideas (crafts) etc. In this area it is advisable not to put pre- conceived ideas into the child, as this would hamper his/ her creativity. Let me explain this with a real life example. In a pre-school a toddler always use to colour the tree and the leaves black. The facilitator was surprised to see this and when the child repeated the same thing many times, she decided to talk to the parent of the child about it. After a discussion it was found that the child used to visit his grandparents palace during his vacations and at that time of the year the trees of the forest were burnt down...the impression of burnt trees and leaves were imprinted in the child mind and hence he would always colour the trees and leaves black. So it is important to understand the child psychology. Later the parents were advised to draw his attention to the trees in the surroundings that were green and in this process he understood that the leaves are green in colour. It is important to encourage the creativity ideas of a child by appreciating the small efforts made by him/ her.

Habit formation starts in the formative years. It is pertinent for a child to understand basic hygiene, to know how to maintain cleanliness in the surroundings, to know the basic self- help skills (includes sitting, standing, running, balancing) and independence. This can be taught through different play activities as well as through stories related to these topics. Usually activities like washing the doll in a small tub filled with water by using soap would enable the child to understand the parts of a body, the importance of cleanliness and hygiene and basic life skills; by not allowing the doll to be drowned in the water. It is also very essential that the child learning to develop healthy peer relations and to be able to share and care for the next person. Generally it is seen that children of 2-5 years are self centric. At this age, their world revolves around them. They are very possessive about their belongings and do not like to part with a toy or thing of their choice. To inculcate the habit of sharing, it is essential to involve them in group activities. One such activity is where the child is given a packet of goodies and is told to give away a few of it to his friends, by keeping one or two for him. This encourages the child to part with the things as well as creates a feeling of security that he has a few goodies for him too. Once he parts with the goodies the facilitator or parent should appreciate the gesture so that the child feels that he had done something good.

This is also the right age to inculcate value system in them through narrating moral tales. It may seem impossible to put across the moral of a story to a toddler. But on one occasion, we had narrated the hare and tortoise story, with the moral slow and steady wins the race, to a group of children. The first time, their attention was drawn to the animals that were involved in the story, in the second narration, they were still fascinated with the animals but then there was a general idea that one needs to do ones task, no matter what. Strangely one kid came up with the idea that one should not make fun of others. So it is clear that it is easy to inculcate the moral values by narrating stories. If this is done at a tender age, the society would not only have educated individuals but also good human beings. This would create achievers in the society who would have a firm grounding to the roots and the willingness to look beyond the personal needs and work for the greater good of the nation. So, it is up to you to decide: are we on the right track, as far as our little ones are concerned. If not, let's start it today, it's never too late.

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