

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR LEARNING

Diaper Changing Struggles

Promoting the Life Skill of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning in Toddlers

Five Strategies That Work in Moving from Managing Children's Behavior to Promoting Life Skills

Question: Changing my toddler has become a wrestling match. What can I do to make it less of a struggle?

Establish a safe, secure trustworthy relationship by understanding that your toddler is communicating with you. You can establish a trustworthy relationship with your child through conversation and eye contact.

1. Figure out why your toddler is wrestling with you by watching for clues.

- Is your child uncomfortable during changing? Is she or he too cold? Are the changing wipes too chilly? Is your child sensitive to being touched?

If so, then try to make changing more physically comfortable.

- Is your child trying to become more independent?

If so, build on this emerging independence and begin to teach your toddler how to put on clothes by breaking down the task into small steps. Help with the more challenging steps (e.g., putting your child's feet in each pant leg, buttons, socks, etc.) and let your toddler do the steps that he or she can do independently (e.g., put arms through sleeves, pull up elastic waist pants). Children take great pride in these small accomplishments and become more motivated to do things for themselves.

2. Make it fun. Involve your baby socially, emotionally and intellectually. By providing safety, structure and fun during diaper-changing routines with your young child, you are fostering a secure relationship between you. Daily "have-tos" can be turned into lots of fun for you and your child. Here are a few ideas:

- Turn the classic song "The wheels on the bus go round and round" into your own song: "Your legs go round and round, round and round, round and round" as you move your child's legs in a circle.
- Create a new game. Put your child's feet in front of your eyes and say, "Where am I?" Then move your child's feet, and say, "Here I am."
- Put some stuffed animals on the changing table and have them pretend talk to your child: "The lion says roar, and the pig says oink. What do you say today?"

Nameera Akhtar of the University of California at Santa Cruz found that toddlers are more focused when something is new and different, such as hearing new words. Akhtar says, “I think [our] experiments show how motivated children are to pay attention to adults’ conversations—and how motivated they are to learn new information.”

3. Make the time matter by using rich and diverse language.

- You can talk with your child and explain what you are doing, what is coming next and how it may feel.
- You can play peekaboo when you pull your child’s shirt on. By creating lots of positive feelings, even during the most routine things, you are creating a strong bond with your toddler.
- You can introduce new words. For example, make up rhymes: “Your socks sound like rocks, but they are socks” or “Your shirt has lots of dirt—it is a dirty shirt.”
- Give your toddler something to hold that interests him or her, such as a plastic jar filled with things that your child can shake and make noises.
- Talk about the different sounds he or she makes.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests the following safety measures during diaper changing:

4. Prevent your toddler from falling. Make sure the location for changing clothes and/or diapers is safe.

5. Avoid excessive force. When handling your toddler, be sure to be gentle, no matter how intense the “wrestling matches” become.

These five strategies will promote the life skill of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning and move from managing children’s behavior to promoting life skills in fun and doable ways.

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning: It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

Mind in the Making (MITM), at The Bezos Family Foundation, is an unprecedented effort to share the science of children’s learning with the general public, families and professionals who work with them. Based on *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (HarperCollins, 2010) by Ellen Galinsky, Chief Science Officer at The Bezos Family Foundation, its mission is to promote Executive Function life skills in adults and through them in children in order to keep the fire for learning burning brightly in all of us.

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