

The Challenges of the Terrible Twos

By Valerie Dansereau

Having a two-year-old can be compared to living with an unpredictable, slightly insane stranger. Although all children are different, the phase known as "terrible twos" is characterized by dramatic temper tantrums and mood swings. You may wonder where in the world your sweet loving baby went.

New parents are often caught off-guard by the beginning of the "terrible twos" before the child has reached her second birthday. Most are clearly in this phase by eighteen months. "NO" becomes the child's favorite word. She is striving for independence. She is trying to carve out who she is separate from you or anyone else.

A two-year-old is alternately clingy, whiny and defiant. Her tantrums often come on without warning.

One predictable aspect of this phase is an insatiable curiosity. Your two-year-old wants to learn and explore the taste and feel of everything she comes in contact with.

For example, recently my two-year-old granddaughter went into the bathroom and came out covered in toothpaste. She got into a bottle of her mother's nail polish once and painted her toes - not just her toenails.

The worst incident of my granddaughter's terrible twos occurred one night recently when I was out. My granddaughter was alone with her mother, who made the mistake of turning her back on this curious two-year-old. I came home to find that my kitchen had been colored with a permanent marker, which I didn't even know was in the house, let alone in reach of a two-year-old.

Children always have lessons to teach us. So from the latest two-year-old in my life, I have learned that a pencil eraser removes permanent marker from woodwork and cooking spray removes it from linoleum.

I have learned I need to have a Magic Eraser in my house at all times.

I have learned my home was never as child proof as I thought it was.

I have learned my granddaughter won't hug me if her mother is in the room.

I've learned that BA BA QUE PA means Sponge Bob Square Pants.

The terrible twos aren't really so terrible. The two-year-old is trying to do her job:

- strive for independence

- communicate even though she doesn't have the language skills to do so
- experience all that life has to offer

My job is to help set a predictable routine, childproof my house, set limits and expect them to be tested.

More than that, my job is to savor every moment I get to spend watching her grow.

Well, almost every moment.

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