

What happens when I am two?



Why are two-year-olds so unpredictable? Why can't they wait, take turns and share? Why do they touch everything, find transitions hard and need reassurance regularly?

Delve into the world of two-year-olds and travel into their minds, bodies and emotions to answer some of these baffling questions.

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Please understand..... I am a blender with no lid

At two, I am developing at a rapid rate. I will be trying new things, asserting my ideas, developing self-esteem and making social links. All of these things are essential for my understanding of the world and later well-being. However, I may be chaotic, unpredictable and energetic.

All of these things are developmentally normal, as I learn how the world works, how relationships work and how to be in the nursery/home environment. Can you meet me on my developmental level and provide an enabling environment that will give me a secure foundation for my later life?

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My Brain

At two, my brain is about 75% of the size of an adult, this may sound significant but my brain will continue to develop until I am 25 years of age (Tarry, 2022). Therefore I am far from finished! My brain develops from the back to the front, at two I am developing my mammalian brain, which controls memory, learning and relationships! This means I can start to understand consequences (Neaum, 2019). For example, if I am pouring a cup of water, with experience I can learn to stop before it spills over!

I can also begin to understand the perspectives of others (Theory of Mind) I start to understand what I want, may not be the same as what everyone else wants. Before this time I do not understand that my thoughts are not your thoughts and

think everyone wants the same as me (Mercer, Hupp and Jewell, 2020). This helps me to start having reciprocal relationships as I can begin to predict what you want, how you may act and how you might feel (Owens and Barnes, 2023). These things are at the beginning stages and I still may find these things difficult. Therefore I will still need to be supported to make friends and resolve conflicts (DfE, 2021). My skill of collective co-operation are emerging as my understanding of boundaries and routines grows (Early Years Coalition, 2020).

Developmental stage, Trauma and Epigenetics will also shape the acquisition of these skills.

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Epigenetics

My development will be determined by two aspects Genetics (things I am born with, such as neurodiversity and disease) and Environment (the influencing factors in my home, my community, the country I live and the era I grow up in). Together we call these things Epigenetics. You may have looked at the nature vs nurture debate in previous training. Science now calls this Epigenetics (Weitzman and Weitzman, 2020). This means that while I am born with a DNA chain my environment activates or deactivates certain genes so they can express themselves by being switched on or off (Featherstone, 2017). Wider developmental changes also occur because of these Epigenetic influences in my life. For example, my brain has mirror neurons

which mimic the behaviour of those around me and help me copy the social behaviour of others. Therefore certain neurons are copied from the actions of those around me (Conkbayir, 2017). This has been happening in the womb and in my first two years of life, therefore I can have varied behaviours and ideas about life before I even meet you at two years old. It also means that some of my determinates for life have already been influenced, such as if I grow up around criminal behaviour, high-stress environments or if I have community and family links. What I am shown regularly becomes my view of the world and I behave in a way I think will bring me the most success for my own goals.

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My Emotions

At two my brain is making connections so I can begin to think about my emotions (Early Years Coalition, 2020). This means that I can start to comprehend and use labels for the emotions I may be feeling (DfE, 2021). I begin to be able to display sympathy but as I am still impulsive, I am unlikely to be able to delay gratification to do things such as waiting, sharing and lining up (Neaum, 2019). This also means I am frustrated easily as sometimes the environment requires me to wait for things (and people) I think I can have now. I can still get overwhelmed by intense emotions and this can cause emotional collapse (Early Years Coalition, 2020). Some people label these 'tantrums' but really it's me trying to emotionally cope in a world I can find it hard to regulate myself in.

Self-regulation is the ability to change and adapt your behaviours and emotions to meet external demands (Edossa et al, 2018). In the nursery environment I will need to do this most of the time. However, as I am still developing understanding and control of emotions, I will need a lot of compassion and patience. Before I can self-regulate, I will be either completely dependent for regulation or I will be able to co-regulate with help (Conkbayir, 2017). At this stage I will need adults to help me to separate my emotions from my behaviours by giving me time and space. I will also need help when I act in certain ways, to understand the emotion behind the behaviour. Adults can help to label these emotions and regard me positively no matter how I behave as I am still learning rules and how to regulate.

What do I need from you?



- **I can understand more than I can say.** Can you consider what I am saying without words and read how my actions may communicate my emotions?
- **I will touch things I am not allowed to.** Can you give me exciting things, experiences and hands-on learning that is safe and appropriate?
- **I will find it hard to share.** Can you help me to understand that others have feelings and tell me what they are?
- **It will be impossible for me to wait, line up and sit still.** Can the routine of the day limit these things?
- **I will be unpredictable.** Can you be patient with me and show me how I might do certain things?
- **I won't understand how to respond sometimes** and I will still need you to help me regulate (co-regulate) but can you teach me how you self-regulate?
- **I am learning about my place in the world.** Can you help me achieve, make decisions and be my voice when I do not have one or can't use it?

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References and Further Reading

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