

# “Here I Am!”

For babies, life and learning begin with a focus on self

by *Carla Poole*

**C**ries of “No,” “Me,” and “Mine” represent your toddler’s emerging independence and how he views the world exclusively from his perspective. Egocentrism helps him cope with anxieties and fuels the explorations he needs to learn language, how to walk, and how to form relationships.

feed me, burp me!” With responsive care from nurturing adults, however, he begins to associate positive feelings with certain people. Bonds are formed.

## EMBRACING THE WORLD

By 6 months, your baby begins a love affair with the world. He pokes and prods his body trying to find out how it works. Eventually, he begins to explore objects. When he learns to walk, he is drawn toward his unique interests. A toddler becomes completely absorbed in his explorations—from the amazing tidbits on the floor to the electrical outlets.

This impressive toddler self-determination begins during infancy when your baby experiences unconscious, sensory egocentrism. He is the center of his universe—with loving adults eagerly trying to figure out his every need.

After about six weeks, however, your baby offers social smiles to almost any friendly face. While your baby’s drive for social interaction is strong, his motivation is necessarily self-centered: “Hold me,

A thriving 18-month-old feels all-powerful, deliriously in love with himself, his caregivers, and the world. At the same time, these caregivers begin to provide limits on his behavior. To your toddler,

you are spoiling the fun for no good reason. Toddlers want it all. They want to eat snack *and* climb on the slide. They especially love showing off and running around naked whenever possible.

Limits are essential. No matter how loud or long his vehement protests may be, limits help your child feel secure and protect his safety. A toddler’s “No!” or temper tantrum needs a gentle but firm response with the end goal of building a loving partnership. It’s a lifelong process to curb one’s desires enough to get along with others and retain individuality.

Fortunately, your child’s strong feelings of self-determination are accompanied by an emerging concern for others. While a 24-month-old will still grab a toy from another child, he might look for an adult to stop him just before he makes his move. It’s essential for a toddler to learn that the world doesn’t end if he doesn’t get what he wants. Caring adults can help a toddler maintain a positive sense of self while gradually adapting to social rules. This can be a daunting, but rewarding, experience.

Toddlers begin to cope with an awareness of how the world works, noticing separations from loved ones and potential dangers. Here are ideas to guide your child’s egocentrism:

- Respond to your baby’s needs without hesitation. He can’t adjust to others’ needs.
- After nine months or so, your baby can wait, a bit, before requests are fulfilled.
- Acknowledge your toddler’s strong feelings when you must set a limit.

**0-2  
YEARS**



From head to toe, a healthy baby is in love with himself.

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