

## Realistic Behavioral Expectations

### What to Expect from 18-36 Months

Children between the ages of 18 and 36 months are at an exciting growth period in their lives. Parents and caregivers observe leaps and bounds in the development of these children and are excited to see all their skills progress. However, as with any growth, there are some behavioral changes that are not so positive. To help with this, it is important to understand what should be expected at this age and what the best approach to getting through it is.

The overall development of children between the ages of 18 and 36 months moves at a rapid rate. Their brains are growing quickly, their language is increasing, and their motor skills are progressing. At the same time, their thinking becomes more developed, and their social and emotional skills enable them to interact in a different way. And while this is an exciting time, it can also be a very difficult time for parents and caregivers.

During these ages, children are also developing independence and their self-identity is growing daily. Because of this they begin making attempts to control their environment, which can lead to defiance in many daily routines and tasks. The word "no" becomes their go-to response and so begins their efforts to resist parental control. The need for this control is accompanied by new and very strong emotions. This often leads to temper tantrums that can cause frustration for parents and caregivers.

It is important to remember, though, that children at this age are not bad or manipulative. They are just very creative when figuring out how to use their new skills to get their needs met. Although these rebellious behaviors can be frustrating and make parents feel as though they have failed, tantrums and defiant behavior at this age are normal and are essentially a sign of healthy development. That does not, however, mean that parents and caregivers should let the behavior go unaddressed.

The key during this time of transition, for both the child and the parent, is for the parent to not engage in power struggles. Using guidance as a tool to stop unwanted behaviors or to prevent them all together, is a great way to go about it. This, along with the use of positive reinforcement, will give children at this age early training in learning to control emotions and make choices, while giving them the freedom to develop their independence.

The Mini SKILLZ program was developed after an extensive amount of research was done on what the appropriate expectations for this age group are and how to use this to help them advance beyond their current stage of development. Since the program is a type of guardian and me program, it also helps the parent learn skills that will benefit their child. While there are physical drills that are done, every class is also filled with opportunities for the instructor and the guardian to help with the children focus, patience, and positive interactions. The game-based learning approach along with positive reinforcement in each class is the foundation of long-term success for this age group.

Growth is always positive but can come with some challenges as well. Reframing your view of a toddler is a great way to start. See them as curious and capable instead of defiant. Although some behaviors may be more challenging than others, guidance instead of constant correction will always bring about the best result in the end.