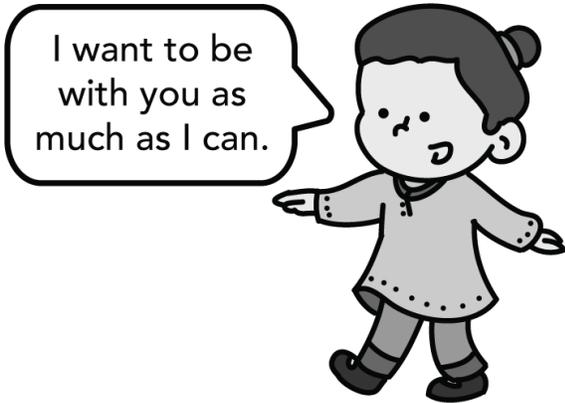




**Your Trusting Relationship Dance with a Toddler On-the-Move**



**Figuring It Out Together**

Your relationship is like a dance. As you communicate and model trusting interactions with your child, she learns about the back and forth of trust. By the time she is a toddler, your child has a clear idea of who she wants to be with, usually you and other familiar and trusted adults in her life.

Her new communication and physical skills allow her to make this known, clearly and loudly.

For example, you may notice that she does the following:



Clings, hits, and/or screams when it is time to say "goodbye" at child care even though you know she has a good time there.



Runs toward you for a hug when you come home after being away, or she may also ignore you or be angry. These are all ways of letting you know she missed you, though some are harder to take than others.



Brings a book to you and climbs up on your lap even though you are ready to start making dinner.

Over time, the trust that exists between you and your child allows her to trust others and want to be with them also. But for now, your dance partner may often stick as close to you as she can. Keep watching and you will see signs of her growing trust in herself and others. For example, you may hear her repeating your words to her teddy bear, "You are OK. We are together, and I will keep you safe."



## Figuring Out Her Moves on the Dance Floor

Toddlers' behaviors can be confusing. She may insist, "No!" even as she reaches for a cookie. She may blurt out "Me do it!" one minute, and the next moment she calls for help to put on her shorts. Here are some ideas to help you understand her moves:



### **Ask yourself "What is she experiencing?"**

It may help you to imagine the words in a thought balloon over her cute little head.



### **Look for patterns in her behavior.**

This can help you figure out how to keep your dance as smooth and enjoyable as possible. For example, knowing she is a child who needs lots of time to wake up in the morning can help you adjust your morning routine.



### **Follow her lead, then respond.**

Researchers call this "serve and return," and it is one of the best ways you can help organize her brain and strengthen the trust between you. For example: When she wiggles and protests as you change her diaper, she may be telling you, "I love to move. I have to move." When you say, "I know this isn't your favorite," then give her a diaper to hold, you are helping her learn, "You understand what I am feeling. We are partners in changing my diaper. I can help! I can do it!"

## When You Step on One Another's Toes

All dancers get out of sync or stumble. There will be times you get upset with each other. It is part of life.

When things don't turn out the way you planned or wish, acknowledge it:

"We both sure got upset today when you wanted to walk, and I wanted you to ride in your stroller. I am sorry I yelled at you. How about we try again tomorrow? If we leave earlier, you can walk, and I'll bring the stroller in case you get tired."



### **You are Her Base of Security**

No matter how big and independent she seems, she still relies on you (and other familiar, trusted adults) to help her feel safe. Your presence energizes her to be able to play, explore, discover, and learn. Your toddler shows you how important you are when she does the following:



Sticks by your side even when other children are playing a fun game.



Pulls you by the hand over to the sandbox and insists you sit down next to her.



Pulls your face towards her when you are talking with another adult.



Looks back at you from across the playground and waits for your smile before she starts to climb.



Wants to eat the food on your plate.