



Toddlers, Twins, and Parents of Twins

I was speaking with a mom of twin toddlers the other day that was lamenting the fact that her girls were no longer content playing by themselves. They both want mom at the same time now and are bent on outdoing the competition. Mom used to be able to placate one while she handled the other. Unfortunately, now the stakes have changed. If she is sitting with one on her lap, the other comes and rests her head “assertively” on mom’s knee, making it very clear that she is not pleased about her sister’s “top billing”.

I reminded mom that developmental stages just happen. Often we are so preoccupied with the everyday hustle and bustle that we don’t necessarily recognize the shifts and changes until we find ourselves right smack in the middle of them. Parents of adolescents bemoan the fact that it felt as if their beatific son or daughter turned into a surly adolescent over night! Something similar occurs with toddlers. Their invigorated sense of self and new felt autonomy changes the rules of the game. Parents need to understand the game before hand so that they can be aware of the winning strategies. This does not mean, of course, that you will win by entering into a battle of wills. To the contrary, the emotional strategies that help you understand and communicate with your child will help to socialize and protect your forward moving toddler to feel masterful in a secure and predictable world. In addition, there is the challenge of learning how to evaluate which battles are worth fighting. Aside from issues of health and safety, many first time parents understandably struggle with figuring out what is important for their children within the framework of their family, the community, and their culture.

Dr. Jenn Berman has a wonderful new book called *Super Baby*. It is available for early order on Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.com. Her chapters that describe how to handle an out of sorts toddler are excellent because they help parents understand a toddler’s emotional and physical struggles from the toddler’s age appropriate developmental level. Dr. Berman gives lovely examples about how to talk to toddlers, how to give them choices, how to set effective limits, and “how to say no without saying no”. She explains why parental predictability and consistency is key to a toddler’s healthy emotional maturation.

Parents of twin toddlers face additional challenges. Often they are required to make a decision that benefits one twin and makes it difficult for the other. Some expectations must be the same for both children in order for the parents to model consistent, clear, and unwavering behavior about specific limits and rules. For example, one mother told me that she had to take away the bottle from one twin because the other refused to use her Sippy cup when she saw her sister with the bottle. Another mom told me that she had to enforce the same rules for both of her sons about using the pacifier in order to quell the protests of inequality. It takes tremendous courage for parents of twins to make decisions that do not necessarily reflect the individual needs and wishes of both children. Usually parents of singletons are not so vigorously or repetitively challenged by their children about “unfair practices”.

While I believe that parenting the first time around involves a big learning curve for most couples, the additional commotion and complications of two at a time poses an extra challenge that is exhausting and depleting. The good news is that this stage does not last forever. In fact, these little dynamos turn into loving preschoolers who remind us about the infinite wonders of life all around us that we often take for granted. ■

