



Our Toddler Curriculum

2–3 Years

Play Days Nursery & Academy



Toddlers are extraordinary — spirited, wilful, determined, wonderful, exactly as they were created to be. Our toddler curriculum meets them exactly where they are.

Mel & the entire Play Days Toddler Team

Helping Hands • Happy Hearts • Healthy Minds



EYFS 2026



The Toddler Years- Terrific Two's

We refer to our toddlers as **Terrific Two's**. 'Terrible twos' sets adults up to expect trouble, & children pick that up. Two is the year a child works out they are a separate person with their own will & their own opinions. That is a developmental achievement, not a behaviour problem.

A Toddler's Rules of Possession

We share this list with families because it explains typical two-year-old behaviour & attitudes that child minded practitioners need to support children to navigate successfully:

1. If I like it, it's mine
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine
5. If it's mine, it must NEVER appear to be yours in any way
6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine
7. If it looks just like mine, it is mine
8. If I saw it first, it's mine
9. If you are playing with something & you put it down, it automatically becomes mine
10. If it's broken, it's yours

Toddlers cannot yet hold their own wants & somebody else's in mind at the same time; that comes later & it has to be taught. We teach it through turn-taking with an adult alongside, sand timers, 'you can have it next', & consistent repetition. We do not shame a child for behaving exactly as their development dictates they will.

The toddler years — broadly from 2 to 3

— represent one of the most extraordinary periods of human development. In just twelve months, your child's brain makes more connections than at virtually any other time in their life. Language develops rapidly. Personality emerges with real force. Independence is fiercely asserted. And the big emotions — they are very BIG indeed.

Toddlers are not being naughty when they say 'NO!' with great conviction, or when they protest because their toast was cut the wrong way. They are developing autonomy, testing boundaries & learning what it means to be a person in the world. This is entirely normal — & it is our job to understand it, not simply manage it.

Our toddler curriculum is grounded in the same strong foundations as our baby provision, now extended to meet the growing capacities of the toddler mind.

Our Theoretical Foundations

Jean Piaget — Learning Through the Senses

Piaget's work reminds us that young children learn through their senses & through their actions on the world around them. Every treasure basket, every heuristic play experience, every moment of exploration is purposeful, rich learning.

Rudolf Steiner — The Importance of Rhythm & Routine

Steiner's philosophy reminds us of the deep comfort that rhythm & routine bring to young children. The gentle yet stimulating, predictable flow of our toddler day — explore, play, take risks, rest & replenish — provides a consistent, reassuring framework within which toddlers can thrive.

Reggio Emilia — Environment as the Third Teacher

Inspired by Reggio Emilia, we design our toddler spaces as thoughtful, considered learning environments. Natural materials, interesting textures, real objects & open-ended resources invite children to explore, discover & investigate.

The Key Person Approach — Bowlby & Ainsworth

This sits at the heart of everything we do. Every child has a dedicated Key Person who knows them well — their preferences, their cues & their character. This secure attachment is the foundation upon which all other learning is built.

Emotion Coaching — John Gottman

Our staff are skilled Emotion Coaches. They recognise, name & respond to the emotions they observe in your child — every smile, every frown, every interaction, every moment of distress or dysregulation. We are attentive to the whole child, always. *Toddlers feel everything intensely* — & they need adults who can help them name, understand & navigate those feelings. Our Emotion Coaching approach means we connect first, always, before we think about the behaviour.

Pro-Risk & Barefoot Play

We believe firmly in the value of safe, natural risk-taking. Barefoot play supports proprioception, balance & physical development in the most instinctive, purposeful way.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning (EYFS 2026)

Everything we plan & do is underpinned by the three Characteristics of Effective Learning:

- **Playing & Exploring** — finding out & exploring, playing with what they know, having a go
- **Active Learning** — being involved & concentrating, keeping trying, enjoying achieving
- **Creating & Thinking Critically** — having their own ideas, making links, choosing ways to do things

Schemas — Following Your Child's Fascinations

Toddlers often have powerful, repeating patterns of behaviour — schemas — that drive their play. Transporting, enclosing, rotating, trajectory, connecting — these are not random; they are purposeful

cognitive work. Our practitioners are trained to recognise, support & extend schema play as a rich learning tool.

Positive Relationships & Key Person

Your child's Key Person remains the anchor of their experience at Play Days. They know your child deeply, plan for them individually & ensure they feel secure & celebrated. In the absence of the identified & named key person, each child is assigned a 'Buddy' key person to ensure they have someone that is 'special' to them at all times

Areas of Learning & Development

Our curriculum covers all seven areas of the EYFS, with the three Prime Areas as our absolute priority for this age group.

Why the Prime Areas come first

The three Prime Areas are not three areas among seven. The four Specific Areas build on them, & unlike the Specific Areas they do not develop on their own — they need adult time, attention & skill.

Between two & three this is where the greatest gains are made. A child who can tell us what they need, manage a big feeling with support & move confidently is in a position to learn. A child who cannot will struggle with everything else, however well it is taught.

The Specific Areas are woven through everything we do — stories & songs, sorting & counting at tidy-up time, mud, paint & pretend play. We notice & celebrate them. We do not pursue them at the expense of the Prime Areas. Where a child needs more time talking, regulating or moving, that is where the time & support goes.

Parents: if we tell you we are focusing on your child's talking, their feelings or their physical confidence, we are not neglecting letters & numbers. We are doing the work that has to come first.

PSED — Personal, Social & Emotional Development

PSED is the foundation of everything. Until a child feels safe, valued & understood, very little else is accessible to them. This is why PSED receives the highest priority in our toddler room — every single day.

Emotion Coaching in the Toddler Room

When your toddler is overwhelmed, our first response is always connection. We get down to their level, name what we see & acknowledge the feeling before we address the behaviour. **'I can see you're angry, that it's tidy-up time', *Let's take a breath together.***

Two resources support this work every day:

- **Feelings Thermometer** — a simple visual scale that helps toddlers see & show us how BIG a feeling is, so they can begin to recognise & name it for themselves.
- **Persona Dolls** — **Simon & Sita** — our persona dolls bring feelings, friendships & everyday dilemmas into the room safely, at one step removed, so children can explore big emotions through story & play.

This section should be read alongside our **Behaviour & Emotional Support Policy 2026**, which sets out our 'GO' behaviours, our **Golden Rules**, our **Noise-o-meter**, **Brilliant Buddies**, & our step-by-step response in full.

Golden Rules — Kind Hands, Listening Ears, Looking Eyes, Indoor & Outdoor Voices, Walking Feet

Our Golden Rules grow with your child. In the toddler room, *'Kind Hands' & 'Good Listening'* are consistently modelled, gently reinforced & celebrated. We use visual supports, Makaton signing & consistent language so every child can access our expectations — regardless of their communication level.

Our *Brilliant Buddies* system celebrates kind, positive behaviour — catching children doing the right thing & ensuring they know they are noticed & valued.

Communication & Language

Between ages 2 & 3, most children's vocabulary grows from around 50 words to over 300. This is one of the most significant periods in language development — & we are attentive to every new word, every sentence attempt & every early approximation.

- **Fun Time** — a small group, language & interaction session led with one member of Toddler & Pre-school staff.
 - **Story Sessions & Social Interaction Sessions** — daily, interactive & joyful. We use books, puppets, props & our own storytelling to bring language alive.
 - **Makaton Signing** — used throughout the day with every child to reinforce key words & support pre-verbal & EAL children.
 - **Vocabulary Flowers & Word Sheets** — each curriculum topic grows a flower of new words, chosen across word classes: nouns to name things, verbs for what we do & adjectives to describe. Shared via our Nursery in a Box parent portal so families can extend learning at home.
 - **Talking Tots (I CAN Communication Strategy)** — communication-focused sessions developing attention & listening, understanding what is said, learning & using new vocabulary, building sentences & talking socially.
 - **Responsive Conversations** — we follow your child's lead. We observe, Listen, comment, narrate, extend, expand & celebrate every communication attempt.
 - **Talk-Rich Environments** — labels, books, question prompts & language-rich resources embedded throughout our provision.
 - **Play Interaction, Attention & Communication Chats** — OWL (Observe, Wait & Listen), the 10-second rule & our Noise-o-meter, used consistently by every practitioner.
 - **A Calm Environment** — considered noise levels, uncluttered spaces & unhurried routines, so that listening & talking are always possible. Low volume, Classical music used as background ambience to create an effective nurturing & effective communication environment!
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Physical Development

Toddlers run, climb, jump, spin & fall over & get straight back up. This is not excess energy — it is essential neurological development, & we embrace it fully.

Accidents will happen as children develop physical skills, problem-solving & safe risk-taking. We do not remove that learning; we support it, supervise it well & help children recover & try again. Our ***Risky Play Policy & Bare Foot Policies*** should be read in line with this statement.

Outdoor & Nature-Based Learning

Our outdoor provision is planned with the same intentionality as our indoor learning. We go outside every day — come rain, come shine, come mud. Nature is one of the most powerful learning environments there is.

Barefoot & Risky Play

We advocate strongly for barefoot & risky play. Climbing, balancing, digging, jumping — these develop proprioception, core strength, risk-assessment & resilience. We always carry out a dynamic risk-benefit assessment, never a risk-removal assessment.

Fine Motor & Self-Care

Threading, cutting, painting, pouring, fastening — fine motor skills are developed through rich, purposeful provision every day. Self-care independence — dressing, toileting, feeding — is encouraged, supported & celebrated at every opportunity.

All toddlers are encouraged to begin toilet training at the earliest opportunity. We support this with messy play & sensory experiences that build the confidence to have a go, & we work in close partnership with you — communicating clearly when we believe it is time to start, so that home & nursery move together.

Toilet Training Workshop — we run a workshop for toddler families covering readiness signs, practical routines & how we work together to keep the experience calm, positive & pressure-free.

Our Curriculum Offer

- Open-ended art & mark-making — the process always matters more than the product
 - Music, rhythm, movement, dance & yoga woven into every day
 - Sensory & messy play experiences that invite genuine exploration
 - Small world, role play & imaginative scenarios that build narrative & social understanding
 - Seasonal & nature-based learning — observing change, exploring the living world
 - Simple mathematics through play — sorting, counting, pattern-making & problem-solving in real contexts
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Understanding Behaviour

At Play Days, *we do not simply 'manage' toddler behaviour — we seek to understand it.* Every behaviour is communication. When a toddler bites, hits, snatches or screams, they are telling us something important about their emotional or sensory state. Our job is to hear them & respond with skill.

Our full approach — including our *'GO' behaviours*, our step-by-step response & how we work with you at home — is set out in our **Behaviour & Emotional Support Policy 2026**. Kind, firm, consistent boundaries are not the opposite of warmth; they are a form of care.

Inclusion, Equality & SEND

Every child in our toddler room deserves to feel fully seen, fully valued & fully included — regardless of their developmental profile, additional needs or background.

Our early identification approach means we are always observing, always listening & always working alongside families to ensure that any child who needs extra support receives it without delay. If you have any concern, please speak to your Key Person or our SENCO straight away. Early support always makes the greatest difference. Inclusive practice is not an add-on at Play Days — it is the foundation of everything we do.

- **Early identification** — we observe, listen & act. Targeted support meetings focus on the three foundational areas of learning — Personal, Social & Emotional Development, Physical Development & Communication & Language — so that we intervene at the earliest opportunity. No concern is too small.
 - **SEND Passports, EHCP support & application** — we work closely with families & the Local Authority to secure additional support where appropriate.
 - **SENCO & Early Language Lead oversight** — across all rooms, with close working alongside specialist professionals.
 - **Adapted environments, resources & approaches** — tailored to individual needs, including communication-enabling environments.
 - **Aspirational targets** — for every child, regardless of their starting point.
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Moving On — Transition to Pre-School

When your toddler is ready to move into our pre-school provision, we ensure this transition is as smooth, positive & child-centred as possible. We share detailed Learning Journals, NEXT STEPS, transition booklets, arrange visits & ensure the adults who know your child share their knowledge with the pre-school team.

There is no rush. Every child moves when they are developmentally & emotionally ready — not only when the calendar says so. Transition decisions will always be made in partnership with parents & carers.

Working in Partnership with Families

You are the expert on your child — & we are the experts on child development. That partnership is powerful, & we invest in it deliberately.

- **Nursery in a Box ‘*Care Diary*’**— your window into your toddler’s day
- Regular vocabulary targets to support language development at home
- Termly topic newsletters with ideas for home activities
- An open door — please always come & speak to us
- Floor Learning Books — created with your child, celebrating their learning journey
- **Parent meetings & events** — including our Christmas Open Day, Toilet Training Workshop & termly opportunities to meet your child’s Key Person



I CAN Statements — 2–3 Years

These statements reflect the developmental milestones we nurture across our toddler provision & shared with families to support learning at home.



Personal, Social & Emotional Development

- I CAN play alongside other children & begin to play cooperatively.
- I CAN identify / show my own feelings.
- I CAN accept simple boundaries with support.

Empathy

- I CAN notice when **someone** is sad or hurt & try to help them.
- I CAN manage separations from my carer / family with growing confidence.
- I CAN begin to take turns & share, with adult support.
- I CAN leave my family & play, without my comforters — my dummy, my blanket.

Belonging to the group

- I CAN help tidy away & look after my own belongings



Communication & Language

- I CAN use two- & three-word sentences to communicate.
- Following instructions — I CAN follow a simple instruction, & I am beginning to manage two.
- I CAN ask questions using ‘what?’, ‘where?’ & ‘who?’
- I CAN listen to & enjoy stories, joining in with familiar refrains.
- I CAN use language in play — narrating & directing.
- I CAN use Makaton signs alongside spoken words.



Physical Development

- I CAN run, jump & climb with confidence.
- I CAN kick & throw a ball.
- I CAN hold a pencil or crayon & make marks with intention.
- I CAN begin to manage my own clothing with support.
- I CAN sit at the table to eat my meals & snacks.
- I CAN use a spoon & fork effectively, sitting at the table.
- I CAN drink from an open beaker.
- I CAN pour my own drink from a small jug, expect spillage!

Toilet Training

- I CAN indicate when I am wet or dirty & use the toilet with adult support, & I am learning to manage without nappies or pull-up's



Understanding the World

- I CAN notice & talk about changes in the natural world.
- I CAN talk about my family & immediate community
- I CAN explore & investigate natural materials with curiosity.

Helping Hands • Happy Hearts • Healthy Minds



Mel, Tracy, Gemma & the entire Play Days Toddler Team

