

Top Tips for Supporting Two-Year-Olds in Your Setting

Two-year-olds are often described as “terrific” — and rightly so! They are curious, energetic, emotionally expressive, and constantly learning. But they also need sensitive, responsive care to thrive. Based on insights from our *Terrific Two-Year Olds* presentation, here are some top tips to help practitioners create nurturing, developmentally appropriate environments for toddlers.



1. Build Close, Trusting Relationships

Two-year-olds rely heavily on adults for emotional and physical support. Stable, consistent relationships — especially with a key person — are essential for helping them feel secure and confident.

“Children do need sensitive and responsive adults to care for them... Effective practice with all children relies on the practitioner being supportive, sensitive and responsive to their needs.”

2. Respect Their Emotional World

Toddlers experience rapid emotional shifts. What may seem like unpredictable behaviour is actually part of normal development. Responding with patience and empathy helps build emotional resilience.

“A child who feels unsettled or insecure in their childcare setting will not be able to enjoy or achieve to the best of their ability.”

3. Create a Safe and Stimulating Environment

Your setting should support exploration, independence, and comfort. Think soft spaces, accessible resources, and areas for movement and quiet time.

“Organise the environment with well spaced-out areas that support the children’s developing independence and allow for plenty of movement – both inside and outside.”

4. Support Personal Care with Respect

Personal care routines are opportunities to build trust and independence. They should be unhurried, gentle, and carried out by familiar adults.

“Young children need to feel confident their care will be unhurried and gentle and carried out by their key person.”

5. Encourage Independence

Two-year-olds are capable of sharing in their own care. Give them time and space to try things for themselves — even if it's not perfect.

“Avoid taking over or redoing something if it is less than perfect... Care routines are an integral part of the daily planning.”

6. Be Mindful of Language

The way we speak to toddlers matters. Avoid phrases that might feel dismissive or controlling. Instead, use respectful, encouraging language that supports their growing autonomy.

“If we do not use these words when speaking to adults... then what effect do such words have on children?”

7. Prioritise Sleep

Sleep is vital for brain development. Ensure your sleep environment is quiet, clean, cosy, and tailored to each child's needs.

“Sleep supports the body physically, mentally and emotionally... Sleep builds your child's brain.”

8. Partner with Parents

Parents are the experts on their children. Build strong relationships with them, share insights, and collaborate on care routines and developmental goals.

“Practitioners must exchange information with parents about their child's interests and development.”

9. Celebrate Mixed-Age Interactions

Mixed-age settings offer rich learning opportunities. Older children often model behaviour and language, while younger ones benefit from observing and engaging.

“Affectionate relationships can form across the age bands... Two-year-olds in mixed age settings have their own needs which must be met.”

10. Remember: Two-Year-Olds Are Terrific!

“It is better to ensure that there are plenty of open-ended resources that two-year-olds can use without being constantly expected to share.”



EARLY YEARS TEAM

They're not "terrible" — they're learning, growing, and discovering the world. With the right support, they'll flourish.

