

## **IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY**

An interesting aspect of children's development is that with developmental progress comes challenges for both parents and teachers. It's an exciting day when a child utters her first word and then we are thrilled when we can communicate with a child who begins to string words together into sentences. Of course at some point that very same child may use words we wished she hadn't learned, may also use her sentences to voice opinions we wish she didn't hold, and string words together in order to tell a lie.

Countless video cameras have captured the momentous day when our children take their first steps; these will be the same children who track mud on the floor that was just washed and run away from us in the shopping mall. We all want children to be able to think for themselves and become independent beings but thinking for oneself and being independent also leads to the "terrible twos" when children proclaim their separation from their parents by being stubborn, contrary, and by using one of those words they have recently discovered, "No," to make it quite clear that they have their own wishes and beliefs. We also want our children to be social beings and develop friendships but sometimes we may not like the friends they choose and sometimes friends hurt the feelings of friends.

I am certainly not saying that just because it is a sign of developmental progress that it is acceptable for children to use inappropriate words, run away from us at the mall, throw temper tantrums when they don't get their way, hurt the feelings of others, or tell a lie. All of those behaviors may need to be dealt with when they occur. What I am saying is that it might be helpful for parents and teachers to recognize that sometimes behaviors that are problematic arise from new developmental achievements. New developmental achievements like the ability to walk independently, communicate through language, and engage in social relationships can be thought of, in a way, as the acquisition of power. With power comes responsibility, and it is the role of the parent and teacher to help shape a child to a more acceptable and thoughtful use of these powers. It is also the role of the parent and teacher to recognize that they may not always like the ways in which a child thinks for herself and uses language to express and communicate those thoughts and feelings. Ultimately the direction in which she walks will be hers, the feelings and thoughts she expresses through language will be hers, and the people with whom she chooses to be friends will be hers. As parents and teachers we can try and steer her in the direction we think is right, try to mold the ideas we think she should be following, and suggest the company we think she should be keeping. And sometimes we will be successful, to one degree or another, and other times we won't. And sometimes we will get exactly what we hoped for in the first place - an independent, smart, and social human being.

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