

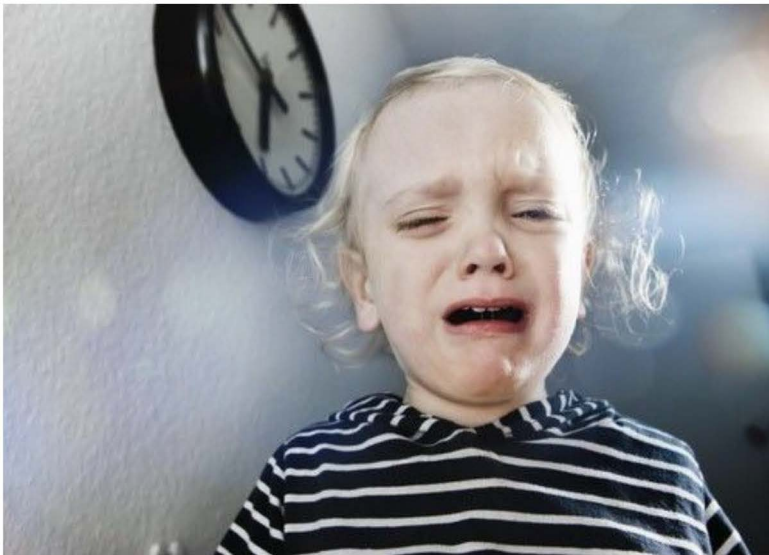
5 Common Reasons Kids Regress & How to Cope



Judy Dutton

October 10 at 4:00 PM

HEALTH CHECK



Whether your **toddler** is hitting every **developmental milestone** early or getting there in his own sweet time, sooner or later they all hit a bump, then backtrack: That amazing vocabulary your little one was flaunting dries up, or their mastery of potty training dissolves in a wet heap of bed sheets night after night. When toddlers regress, parents often worry that something is seriously wrong, but the good news is that's usually never the case. Here are five **common reasons toddlers regress**, plus some advice on handling each hurdle with finesse.

REASON #1: BIRTH OF A SIBLING

Problem: Attention loss. "This is a big one for the little tykes," says Charlotte Reznick, PhD, a child therapist and author of *The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety Into Joy and Success*. "For the first years of their life, if they are the first born, they have been getting all the

attention from parents, grandparents, and family. Even if they have an older sibling, they have been the baby and the apple of everyone's eye. Now they are being dethroned."

Solution: Prepare them beforehand. Since all the attention the new baby gets is bound to stir up fears that they'll lose out, "talk about how when a new baby comes, there's just *more* love in the family rather than less for any one person," says Reznick. To further stir up some excitement and dampen resentment, "make or purchase gifts for your toddler from their new baby brother or sister, and have your toddler choose a welcome to the world baby gift for their new little sibling," says Reznick. "Let your family know when they buy baby gifts, bring a little something small for the older one as well, or to do something so they don't feel left out." Once the baby has arrived, it also helps to tell toddlers simply that they have an important job -- to be a big brother or sister -- and that you will need their help taking care of the new baby. Once the baby is born, give them very simple tasks like getting the diapers, smiling, talking to the baby, and keeping you company when you change their diapers.

REASON #2: STARTING DAYCARE OR PRESCHOOL

Problem: Separation anxiety. "Parents represent safety and security," points out Reznick. Plus, be aware that in most cases the concept of "object permanence" hasn't sunk in: So when you leave, your toddler may have no idea whether you'll ever come back!

Solution: Proceed slowly, ramping up over a week or two if possible. "Instead of five days of preschool, try two or three and for an hour or two," suggests Reznick. "Sit in the class with your child, and do not leave until he or she is comfortable. Many teachers will say your child will be okay and stop crying after you leave. That may be true, but the stress may still be there. So choose a place that will let you leave slowly." If you don't have the time to do that because you have to be at work, perhaps you have a trusted auntie or grandma that can help ease the transition.

REASON #3: THEY'RE MASTERING A MILESTONE

Problem: It's hard to walk and chew gum at the same time. "Kids brains are exploding with information from birth to age 5," says Reznick. "So it's challenging to learn so many new skills at once; something often suffers. So little Amy may have started using words when she was 9 months old, but when she starts walking at 12 months, she seems to lose her ability to speak. Or Alec may be super verbal with full sentences and even paragraphs at 22 months, but his excitement about potty training falls flat. He can't focus on another big trick like pooping in the potty."

Solution: Be patient and pick your battles. "Praise for the behaviors you want to encourage and ignore the others if at all possible," says Reznick. "Sometimes our kids seem so advanced, we inadvertently push -- for example, with potty training. They want to, they like the idea, but they are just not ready. They will let you know when they are ready; likely they will just do it."

More from *The Stir*: [7 Potty Training Mistakes Moms Make & How to Avoid Them](#)

REASON #4: THEY'RE GETTING PICKED ON BY THEIR PEERS

Problem: Toddlers can be cruel -- and sooner or later even the most likeable child can be a victim of some not-so-nice behavior from his peers. He might get kicked, bitten, ignored, or excluded by other kids on the playground, daycare, or at preschool. And guess what happens once your poor child comes home? He wants to vent his frustration and right the karmic balance by mistreating someone with whom he feels safe, like a younger sibling or even you.

Solution: Distraction. Don't scold immediately, tempting though that may be. "Scolding immediately is just going to bring more tears and unhappiness," warns Reznick. Instead, start with plain old distraction. "Scoop up your child and say, 'Oh my, I see you're grabbing toys from your brother, but look at this book! Let's read it together.'" Then at another point when your child is calm, ask whether anything is bothering him with questions like, "So I notice you aren't talking much about your friend Andy. Did he do something that made you mad or sad?" If your child admits he's being mistreated, bring it up with the other child's parent or preschool teacher or someone who's present and can intervene with this damaging dynamic.

REASON #5: PARENTS ARE FIGHTING, SEPARATING, OR DIVORCING

Problem: Fear. However hard relationship rifts are on the adults involved, it's downright terrifying to kids. "Conflict between partners is common, but when your little toddler hears loud fighting or screaming, it's very frightening and confusing," says Reznick. "His internal peace and stability is greatly affected by your outside peace and stability."

Solution: Keep your voice down. While fighting with your partner is inevitable, try to shield your child and do not fight in front of him and keep your voices at reasonable levels. "Some parents feel it's good for their kids to see the real world, but a toddler is too young to understand," explains Reznick. "They may even think your fighting is their fault." And while separation and divorce can be a fact of life, if it happens, it's particularly important to keep your child your #1 priority -- like by not badmouthing your ex-partner in front of your kids, since it can breed mixed emotions that can throw them for a developmental loop.

Did your toddler regress at any point?

Image © Bernd Vogel/Corbis