

Stage Three – “Thinking” from about 18 Months to about 3 Years

In order to separate from parents, children must learn to think and solve problems. Learning to express and handle feeling is also important. This lesson is the focus of Stage Three – the “outthinking” stage.

Helpful parent behaviors:

- Affirm the child for doing developmental tasks
- Continue to offer cuddling, love, safety, and protection
- Celebrate the child’s new thinking ability
- Encourage cause and effect thinking
- Provide reasons, how to, and other information
- Accept positive and negative expression of feelings
- Teach options for expressing feelings instead of hitting or biting
- Set reasonable limits and enforce them
- Remain constant in the face of a child’s outbursts; neither give in nor overpower
- Provide time and space for the child to organize thinking
- Give simple, clear directions a child can follow; encourage and praise achievement
- Expect a child to think about his own feelings and start to think about other’s feelings
- Think of and refer to a child as a “Terrific Two”
- Take care of own needs

Unhelpful parent behaviors:

- Using too many don’ts and not enough do’s
- Getting caught in power struggles
- Trying to appear to be a good parent by having a compliant child
- Referring to the child as a “terrible two”
- Refusing to set limits or expectations
- Setting too high expectations
- Expecting child to play “with” other children before learning to play “near” others
- Refusing to use discipline for not thinking
- Shaming the child
- Discounting

Job of the child:

- To establish the ability to think for self
- To test reality, to push against boundaries and other people
- To learn to think and solve problems with cause and effect thinking
- To start to follow simple commands
- To express anger and other feelings
- To separate from parents without losing their love
- To start to give up beliefs about being the center of the universe
- To continue tasks from earlier stages