



The Things a Two-Year-Old Child Can Teach You

By Melodee Simmons, former Preschool and Early Childhood Learning Center Representative*

I started working in early childhood education by accident. During high school, I took a child development class in which we had to work in a childcare center for a semester. I remember I could not wait for that semester to end! Everything was unorganized; the children seemed to lack any discipline. I remember thinking, “This is not for me!”

Fifteen years later, my husband and I were living in another state with our two children. Our youngest son had just started first grade. I had stayed at home with the boys while they were young but as they grew up I began considering my next steps. Our church had a children’s learning center. But after my previous unfortunate experience at a childcare center, I thought I would never consider such opportunities!

One day, the director of the center called and said they needed me to help them. The teacher of the two-year-old children had to quit working, and the center needed someone to help for the rest of the school year. Of course, I said “No” not wanting to relive my previous experience. Several weeks later, she called me again. The center could not find anyone, and they desperately wanted me to help. I finally said I would help but only for a few months!

Was It the Right Decision?

On my first day, I found myself in the smallest room in the building with eight two-year-old children. Each had a piece of tape on their back with their name, and all needed to be potty trained. The room had a few toys, construction paper, and crayons. I asked what they wanted me to do with the children, and they said I could do whatever I wanted. Now, remember this was 30 years ago; regulations have changed a lot since then.

So there I was! The first thing I did was to get to know the children through play. I had just raised two boys through this stage. I thought that if they were playing, they would not be as likely to get into trouble.

A daily routine helped. The children realized what would be happening and knew what to expect. This helped the children to feel safe and secure in the school environment, which made it easier for the transition from parents to school in the morning. We colored pictures, tore paper (and threw it around). They learned to glue things we found outside to paper and to say the names of the things they found. We sang songs, moved to the music, and did exercises. The children loved to paint with their fingers, brushes, feathers, and anything we could find. The work was extremely busy but so much fun.

That First Year I Discovered So Many Things.

- Two-year-olds are so much fun, and they never stop moving. I always had to have an eye on each one. I wished I had eight eyes. Having that little room turned out to be perfect for us. There were not a lot of places for the children to run and hide. It was easy to watch what each child was doing while I was helping another child with potty training.
- I learned to be prepared for the day before the children came to me. If I had not taken the time to gather supplies and get my plan of action together, we never seemed to get the day going smoothly.
- I learned that praise goes a long way in getting children to do what you want them to do. Praise for doing what they should do is much better than complaining about what they are not doing right.
- Children also love to have you say their name. If I said, “Madison, I like the way you picked up your toys,” I would see Kevin start picking up toys and look at me, waiting for his recognition. Of course, we all want to be recognized for the things we do. That need starts when we are young.
- Potty training eight children was not as hard as I thought it would be. It just took routine and perseverance. I discovered the magic of stickers. The children loved to show off the stickers they earned for going to the potty.
- Children can remember and repeat what you tell them. This is a perfect time to teach simple Bible truths. Parents loved it when their little one said a Bible verse. They were also able to sing many songs.

- I found that they could sit and listen to several stories at a time. They had their favorite stories and wanted me to read them often. Some of the children were able to repeat lines from the books with me.
- The thing that I needed to remember always was to keep prayer on the daily list of things to do. I needed to pray before the day started. I needed to whisper a quick prayer when that challenging child decided to be just a little bit more challenging than usual or when I was tired and needed an extra boost for the day. Whatever was happening, I needed God's help throughout the day.

Make It an Adventure!

That first year soon became the second, then the third, and on and on. So many things changed over 30 years. I worked in different schools, held various positions, and dealt with many different personalities. I continued to depend on prayer to help me with day-to-day life. Prayer will help you through the rough times and keep you focused on what is important.

The most important thing I discovered my first year was my love for all children and the joy of watching them learn and grow. You never know what they will say or do. That makes each day an adventure!

***Melodee Simmons** was a former member of the Nazarene Educators Worldwide Council. She was an experienced and devoted childcare provider. We publish this article in her memory because she passed away last year. We miss her. Our condolences go out to her family and all who knew her.