

Thinking Backwards

Cost: None

Mess factor: None

Suggested location: Anywhere

Experiences your children will have

- Returning to an object of interest
- Pointing to or showing something they played with
- Saying one thing he or she did soon after the event

Materials

- New or favorite toys or objects

Beginning

As you and your children play together, pay attention to what toy or object they favor and what they do with it. Gathering information like this will help you support your toddlers as they begin to develop the ability to form and hold images in their mind.

Middle

Call attention to your toddler's developing ability to remember where something of interest is located. For example, when your child returns to a sippy cup, you might say, "You left your sippy cup on the couch before naptime. You remembered where it was!" Older toddlers may point to or show you something they played with, and, eventually, will be able to tell you something they did soon after the event has taken place. To support these developing skills, talk to your toddlers as they play, imitate their actions, and comment on what you are each doing.

Cleanup

Because toddlers are learning to remember where objects are located, store your children's toys and books in a consistent place. Consider placing pictures of your children's toys on the baskets and shelves so their toys are always put away in the same place — it will be easier for them to clean up if they can match the toys to the pictures. As you clean up, give your child a book and ask, "Do you know where this book goes?" Encourage your child's ability to recall by saying something like "You played with a lot of toys today, but you really enjoyed building with your blocks" as you help children put the blocks back on the toy shelf.

End

After you clean up, say something like “You had fun building with something on the floor. Do you remember what you were playing with?” Children might respond by pointing to something they played with or bringing you a block. Respond by saying something like “I remember you played with the blocks. We stacked them high!”

Younger children

Infants are not yet able to form mental images of events but will respond positively to pleasurable events, as if to say, “I’d like you to do that again!”

Older children

Older children who have had practice reflecting on their experiences will move to the next developmental stage, in which they are able to think and talk about several things at once. Encourage children to expand on what they share by asking more questions, such as “What else did you do?” and “What happened after that?”

Hints

- Depending on children’s level of development, they may not respond to questions about what they played with. Consider giving a clue (e.g., you might say, “After you stacked them, you kicked them and they fell down. Can you show me what you were playing with?”). You may realize (after a couple of tries) that your child has not yet reached the stage of being able to point to or talk about what they played with; remember that each child develops at their own pace.
- Often, young children will remember the very last thing they did, which is easier for them to remember than the event in which they spent the most time. Even if you have a specific idea in mind about what your toddler should remember, your child might still choose to show or talk to you about the last thing they did.
- Make comments and ask questions about an activity shortly after it occurs; beginning recallers are more likely to remember events that have just happened.

More!

Use a cloth bag to collect a few toys that older toddlers played with. Soon after you finish playing, pull the objects out of the bag one at a time and talk about what children did with each of the objects. (*Note:* If your toddler prefers to continue playing with the object, let your child play and try this idea on another day.)

Special needs accommodations

Children with special needs might need extra visual prompts to help them remember what they did. Take pictures or video of your older toddler playing throughout the day. Talk with or for your child, describing details of the play materials and what he or she did while playing.