

A toddler speaks out

• DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

Dear Ima and Abba,
Some days I wonder if you “get” me. You know, it is very hard to be a two-year-old.

This is a very difficult time in my life – I have so much to see and do and accomplish. My world is exciting and at times confusing. I’ve had to make lots of changes lately – some of which I’m still working on. Between giving up the breast and bottle, sending my pacifier up to the sky, sleeping in a big bed, using my stroller less and trying to potty train, I have a lot on my mind. Some days are pretty tough. I’ve written you this letter because there are so many things I want you to know. Sometimes I just don’t have the words to tell you how I feel and that’s extremely frustrating.

For starters, this is a time when I am learning to be independent. This means I like to try to do things on my own, in my own way and in my own time. You need to let me explore. Be patient when I want to do it my way and do not rush me. I know that you’re very busy and stressed, but don’t do for me what I can do for myself – because I like to do it. I’m quite grown up, you know.

There is interesting stuff to see and do and I love our walks. Does it really matter where we go? I understand that sometimes you need to help me and I know your job is to always keep me and my world safe, even if I protest when you insist on holding my hand. I also like it when you give me choices. It helps me feel big when I get to choose what food I want to eat. Sometimes, though, I will change my mind or want both. What I loved yesterday I may hate today. Please just let that be okay. I really like when you let me try to put on my clothes, feed myself with a spoon, a fork and even my fingers, brush my teeth, and wash myself. Thanks for giving in to me on the small things, like letting me wear my boots to gan even though it was so hot outside. You were right. It wasn’t a great idea, but you let me see that. I’m glad that you pick your battles and don’t make much of my mistakes. This is how I learn.

Don’t ever be afraid to tell me when I’m playing nicely. Sometimes it seems like you only talk to me when you notice me doing something wrong. I really do love to play by myself but sometimes I just want you right there beside me. You’d be surprised at how creative I can be. I have a great imagination. Also, you know it’s so much easier for me to walk away from you than have you leave me. I especially hate when you forget to tell me you’re going. When I discover it, I feel uncertain and afraid and I cry. Please tell me when you’re leaving and when you’ll be back. If you don’t tell me, I won’t know. I’ll be worried and I won’t trust you, since I’ll never know when you’ll leave me again or if you are coming back. It’s so important for me to feel secure. I am sometimes sad saying goodbye to you, and sometimes I miss you a lot in the morning and when I go to bed at night. I love you so much.

I ALSO want you to know that it scares me when you talk loudly. I like your “indoor” voice so much better. I’ll learn that a “no” is a “no” by your being consistent with me. Sometimes when you won’t let me do things, I do have a temper tantrum. When you don’t understand or let me have what I want it makes me *sooo* angry. Why are you trying to reason with me? I’m not there yet. I don’t want to fight with you. I need you to teach me how to be calm and feel safe. Hug me. I’m too young for you to get angry with me. You should know that I want what I want when I want it – but I’m working on trying to accept that I can’t always do it my way. You help me when I’m upset just by being there, talking to me calmly and hugging me. When you tell me gently how you think I might be feeling, that helps me understand it all, too. Don’t use too many words, though, as it only confuses me.

I love when you catch me ‘being good’ and tell me how proud you are of me, it makes me feel so good

I told you I have a lot on my mind and the pressures of growing up are not easy. It’s no wonder that I wake up some nights screaming. When I get hungry or tired or frustrated, I need you to be there for me and treat me gently as you tell me nicely what I need to do. I love when you catch me “being good” and tell me how proud you are of me. It makes me feel so good. I am trying. Really. After all I’m just two. I love when I can climb into your arms for a good snuggle and you read me a book or two or three. It’s the best. Some of your friends call this time the “terrible twos” but I’m glad that you call it the “terrific twos” and know just when to let me do things by myself and when to help me. I’m not all grown up yet. I can also be very shy, especially with big people.

Did you know that I really like to help? I like to try and put my toys away and my laundry in the hamper. Sometimes, if it suits me, I’ll even bring you what you ask for! I love when we play games and you say, see how fast you can get me my sweater. It makes me run! I know I use the “no” word a lot. I am just learning about rules and it helps me feel very powerful to say “no, no, no” just “because.” When you make a game out of things, it really helps.

One final thing. Please don’t use your phone to entertain me or you. I want all your attention and sometimes I will do silly things to make sure that I get it. I really want you. I love when you get down on the floor and play with me. You make me feel secure. ■

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(Illustrative; PxHere)