Raising Infants and Toddlers into People You Like to Be With
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Babies and toddlers are natural learners. As parents, you are their biggest influence and most important teacher. You will teach your child by the behavior you model for your child.

Caring
Your child will learn how to treat you and others by the way you treat her. When you respond to her cries, she learns she can trust you. She learns to be caring to others as you are caring towards her. When you touch him with gentle hands, he learns to use gentle touches also. Of course, as your child grows, it is important for you to also use words to describe how you understand his feelings or how you like his gentle touches. One way you show you care about your child is by being a good listener. When she babbles to you, copy her sounds. When he begins to use words, let him know that you understand what he is trying to tell you. As you take time to listen and respond, as you get down on your child’s level so that you can hear what he has to share, as you are fully present, your child learns how important it is to give attention to others.

Respecting Others
It is important that your child learns to feel a part of his community so that he feels important to others and treats others as though they are also to be respected. Show interest in the people in your child’s world. Call them by name. Help your child learn to put away her toys when she is finished with them, put his garbage in the trash can, and in other ways follow rules that we have in our homes, classroom, and community that help us to treat others with respect. Talk to your child about why we stop at traffic lights (not so we don’t get in trouble with the police but so that everyone gets a turn driving safely,) why we put our things away (so everyone knows where to look for them when they want to use them,) and why we try to respect others’ feelings. Your toddler might not understand everything you tell her right now but the more you talk about her community, the more she will want to be a member of it. When you show respect for your spouse, your child’s teacher, a fellow driver, or another young child at the center, your child sees that and learns to show respect also.

Self-Confidence
Children learn to be confident in their abilities as they try to do new things in new ways. Failure is often part of the equation. He won’t suddenly walk without sometimes falling. She won’t suddenly talk without some mishaps with articulation or grammar. As a parent, you encourage. If you hear a word spoken incorrectly, you accept it but make sure you say it correctly when you use it. If he tries a task that you realize is not impossible, don’t do it for him but, if needed, show him what might help him reach his goal. As we allow our toddlers to become independent, they feel proud of their abilities and they want to learn more skills. Our job is not to keep them dependent on us but to help them to enter the world with skills that prepare them to deal with people and situations safely. Our job is to help them be the kind of people we like to be around by being that person ourselves.

Source: LSU Cooperative Extension Service.