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6 Signs Your Baby's Happy

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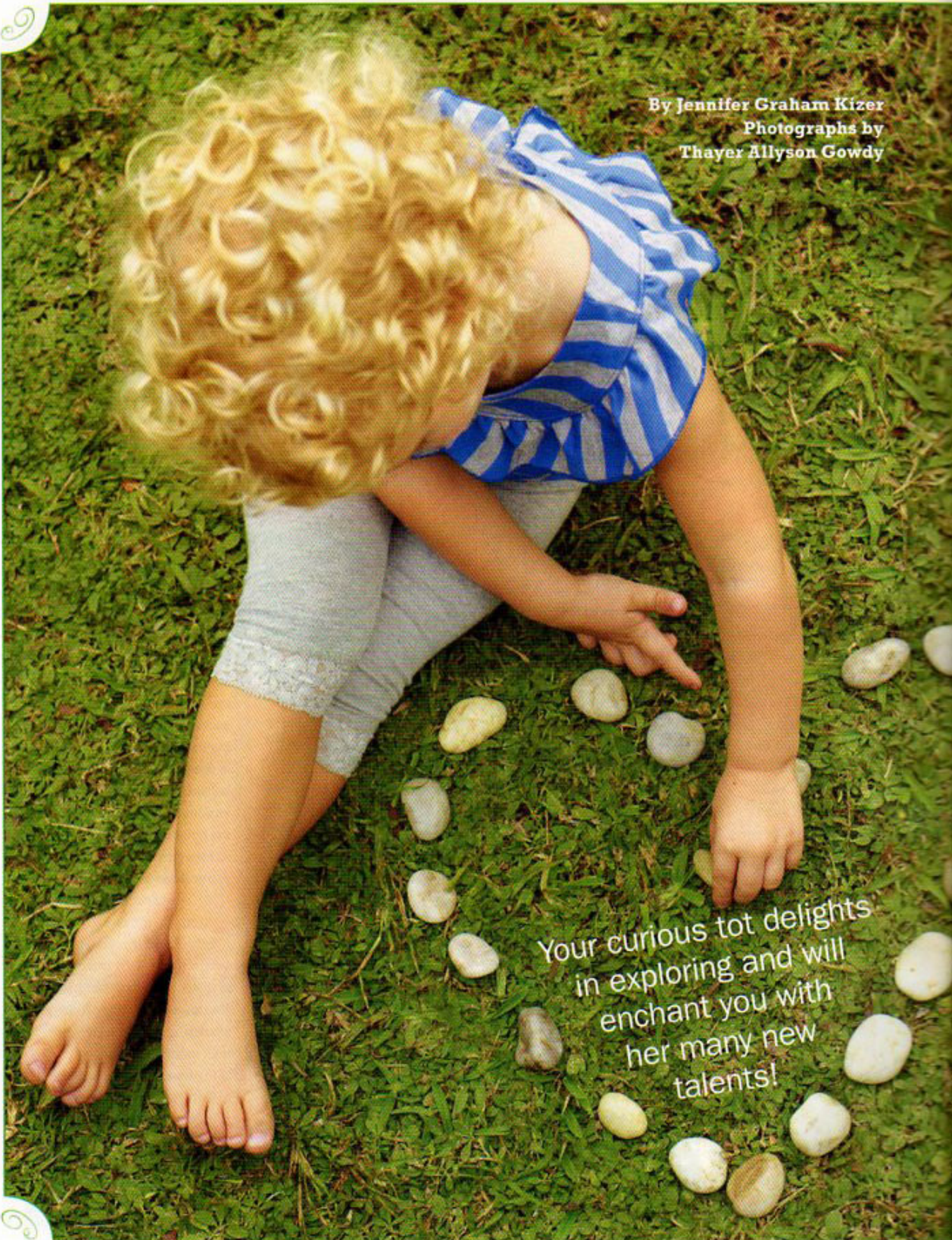
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By Jennifer Graham Kizer
Photographs by
Thayer Allyson Gowdy

Your curious tot delights
in exploring and will
enchant you with
her many new
talents!



WHY WE Love 2-YEAR-OLDS

As your child's second birthday approaches, you may be mourning the end of babyhood. But there are many (funny!) things to look forward to. Maybe it's her cute pronunciation of a word (you say "pajamas," she says "jamamas"). Or his penchant for climbing on...everything. Or the day you'll find her trying to "clean" the cat with your \$30 moisturizer. This is an enchanted age of firsts—first sentences, first songs, and first glimpses at a burgeoning personality. It's also a year of boundary testing, emerging fears, and some seriously inappropriate responses to frustration. But even when the twos are terrible, who doesn't love a kid this age? Beyond their sweet giggles, mischievous antics, and unintentionally funny remarks, there are at least eight more reasons to love having a 2-year-old around.

I At a loss for words? A 2-year-old is happy to remedy the problem.

Typically, children can say about 50 words by the time they're 2, and more than 200 by age 3. "I'm amazed at how quickly he picks up words," says Chantal Sales, of Austin, Minnesota, about her son, Evan. "One day he counts to 3, and the next he's counting to 11—skipping 4 and 5, of course!" Kids this age are beginning to speak in simple sentences, although we're not always sure what language they're using. "My son Maxou just started talking up a storm," says Stacey Dolezal Susini, of Dallas. "And those times when you don't understand him, he closes his eyes in exasperation!"

2

You get to be a hero daily: Shepherding an active 2-year-old will give you plenty of opportunities to avert disaster!

Many a parent has practically caught their 2-year-old swinging from a light fixture. Others, like Danielle Smith, of St. Louis, Missouri, have had to master the art of relentless supervision. On one occasion, when Smith's son Cooper was out of view for a few minutes, "he pulled the stuffing out of the couch cushions, wiped Vaseline over the walls, unwound an entire roll of easel paper, and tore his quesadilla into tiny pieces that he then stuffed up his nose." These days, Cooper stays in Mommy's sight. At all times.

Often, a toddler's shenanigans are purely accidental. Laura Auerbach, of Silver Spring, Maryland, was mortified when she discovered that her son Sam had dialed 911. "When I grabbed the phone, the operator said, 'I've been talking to your son for several minutes,'" she says. "A squad car was already on its way." Oops.

On the other hand, your child's motor development is finally catching up with his physical ambitions. To Kate Clow, of Chatham, New Jersey, that means her 2-year-old, Owen, is a little less clumsy. "It's not quite as scary when he's on the stairs, and his footing is so much better on the playground," she says.



3

You'll have a helper (of sorts!).

Christine Rosmaninho's 2-year-old, Sophia, loves to pitch in with cleaning. The mom from Bayside, Queens, gives Sophia baby wipes to scrub her toys. All right, so this "help" isn't necessarily all that useful, but Noelle Albanito, of Little Falls, New Jersey, is more than happy to oblige her son Thomas's offer to fetch the phone or the remote when she's lying on the couch. (Relish such aid now: It's short-lived.)

Your budding comic will smile at rhymes and silly names.

4 Unfinished decorating projects? You've got a perfect excuse. "My home is one big jungle gym," you explain. Enough said.

At this age, rain puddles beckon. So do ride-on toys, bookshelves, and anything kids can open and close (cabinets, drawers, boxes with 300 pieces of a jigsaw puzzle).

"Our son Armando climbs on everything," says Kelly Stettner, of Springfield,

Vermont. "And he rides his crib rails like a broomstick." Bonnie Duncan, of Kauai, Hawaii, had to trade in her desk for a locked computer cabinet: "My son Kona would pound on the keyboard, and he tried to impress me with his crayon art on the monitor."

5

Ever wondered what it would be like to have a Mini-Me? Now you can live out that fantasy.

Another delicious trait: A toddler's penchant for soaking up grown-up conversation then spitting it out later, often with a lisp. "My daughter Addison says 'Oh my goodness gracious' all the time," says Melanie Nobert, of Maricopa, Arizona. "And her favorite thing to do is pull all her clothes out of her drawers and say, 'This is cute.'" Katherine Loflin-Van Dorn, of Miami, recently discovered that by her own example, she'd inadvertently taught her daughter Gracie a new way to pronounce the word "please." "One night at dinner, my daughter asked for more milk," Loflin-Van Dorn says. "My husband and I replied, in unison, 'What do you say?' To which she responded, 'Oh, puh-leezee.'"

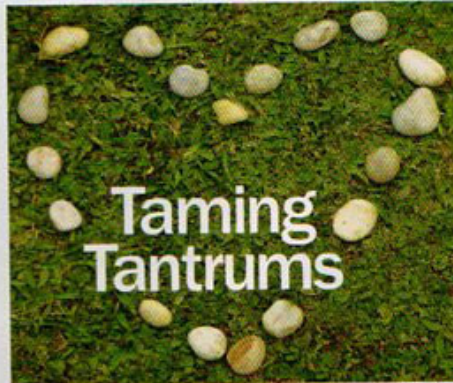
"Addison lines up her princess dolls," Nobert says. "I'll hear her tell them things I've told her earlier, like 'Don't pull the dog's tail, please,' or 'Would you like something to eat?'"

6

They demonstrate the art of being unself-conscious.

When you're 2, every day is Independence Day. And each child has her own way of celebrating it. "We've taken to calling Sophie 'Princess Godiva,'" says Rick Julian, of Atlanta. "She refuses to keep her clothes on. Regardless of the activity, she prefers doing it naked. We dressed her up for her birthday party, and one hour later, she was back in the buff."

Toddlers are very generous with their hugs and kisses.



Meltdowns can (and frequently do) follow on the heels of your tot's new assertiveness. But consider how little of a 2-year-old's day is in his control. It's disappointing to visit places where clothes are mandatory or to relinquish a playmate's really cool dump truck. And he's powerless to change the rules—that is, unless a tantrum proves otherwise. Plus, your 2-year-old still has a limited vocabulary, although he has many wishes and needs he would like you to meet. There's no one way to curb your child's outbursts, so you'll have to experiment with tactics—everything from creating a diversion to ignoring him to giving him space—to rein in his freak-outs.

7

Is patience a virtue you've talked about working on?

Lucky you! You'll have plenty of time to practice.

Among self-respecting 2-year-olds, "I do it myself!" is a battle cry, one they use liberally. "My son Justin can be the sweetest little guy, and then at the drop of a hat, it's his way or the highway," says Suzie Gorski, of Avon, Ohio. "Sydney definitely lets me know if I can help her or not," says Kate Burch, of Norman, Oklahoma. "I cannot dress her. I cannot get her out of her coat at preschool. I cannot get her out of her car seat." When Burch once overrode that last command, Sydney sobbed for a full 45 minutes and tried to return to the car for a do-over.

8

Do predictable people bore you? Your 2-year-old never will!

I call my daughter Lily "my little sack of sugar." But she's also a little sack of contradictions. Bold and social and demonstrably affectionate, she nonetheless pleads, "Mommy, you stay?" when I drop her off at Sunday school. Karen Miller, of Silver Spring, Maryland, has noticed similar

discrepancies with her daughter.

"Isabel wants so badly to be a big girl," Miller says. "She constantly tells us what to do and what not to do! But this 'big girl' is also afraid of the vacuum cleaner and my hair dryer."

Which leads to a final, special reason why 2-year-olds are so darn

lovable: They still need their moms. On rainy days, Chantal Sales takes pleasure in this. "When Evan puts on new rain boots, it seems he has to learn to walk all over again," she says. "It's a reminder of how much of a baby he still is." And what's not to love about that?