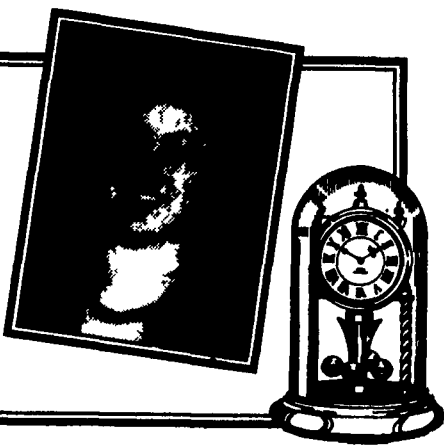


**Taking
Time
by
Rebecca
Escott**



Time With Toddlers
Oh how I love being "Aunt Becca."

This past month I had the chance to spend time with two of my nieces, one who is two years old and another who just celebrated her first birthday. We played and played. Isn't that what aunts and nieces are supposed to do?

Well fall is a wonderful time to explore the world with a toddler who is close to you. Now that the older children are back in school, you may find a bit more time on

your hands to spend with those who are busy cruising around the coffee tables and stepping on your heels in the kitchen.

Toddlers are inquisitive. They thrive when they are given chances to explore the world around them. The youngest toddlers are just beginning to walk independently, but they love to practice this new-found skill. They are naming objects and beginning to combine words. A toddler is still not ready to group play. She is more contented playing independently around other children.

As you explore the world with the toddlers in your life, help them to develop their physical and social skills. Encourage their curiosity. Talk with them so that their language skills increase.

Here's a simple exercise that accomplishes many of these goals. Allow your toddler to take his shoes off and run in the grass. Be sure that the area is free of debris before starting. Then chant this poem together, "Up to the sky, down to the grass; Up to the sky, down to the grass; Turn around, now fall down. Boom!" As you say the poem stretch your arms high, bend to touch the grass. As you finish the poem, circle around and tumble on the grass. Toddlers may take a few practices to get the hang of this, but once they do, they'll want to do it again and again.

Each time you go outside to play, take along a small basket or lunch bag to collect nature "treasures." As your toddler spies things, have her pick them up and place them in the basket. Be sure to give each item a name and des-

cribe it. "Wow. That's a long, brown stick. It has bumps on it. It fell from this tree."

When you sit down for a break, take each treasure out of the basket and rename them. Ask your toddler for one of the treasures by name. See if she can remember its name and pick it out of the crowd. This builds a child's language and observation skills. It also teaches an early appreciation of nature.

Toddlers love sensory experiences. After your next neighborhood birthday party or shower, save the crepe paper streamers. These are wonderful outside toys for youngsters. Urge your toddler to run with a streamer in his hand. They will love the sensation of feeling the paper ripple in the air. By holding two or three different colored strips together, you add to the visual excitement. For those tots who are less mobile, simply stand and twirl a short streamer around your hand. For the really coordinated ones, hold the streamers high (or tie them to a branch), and challenge the children to jump

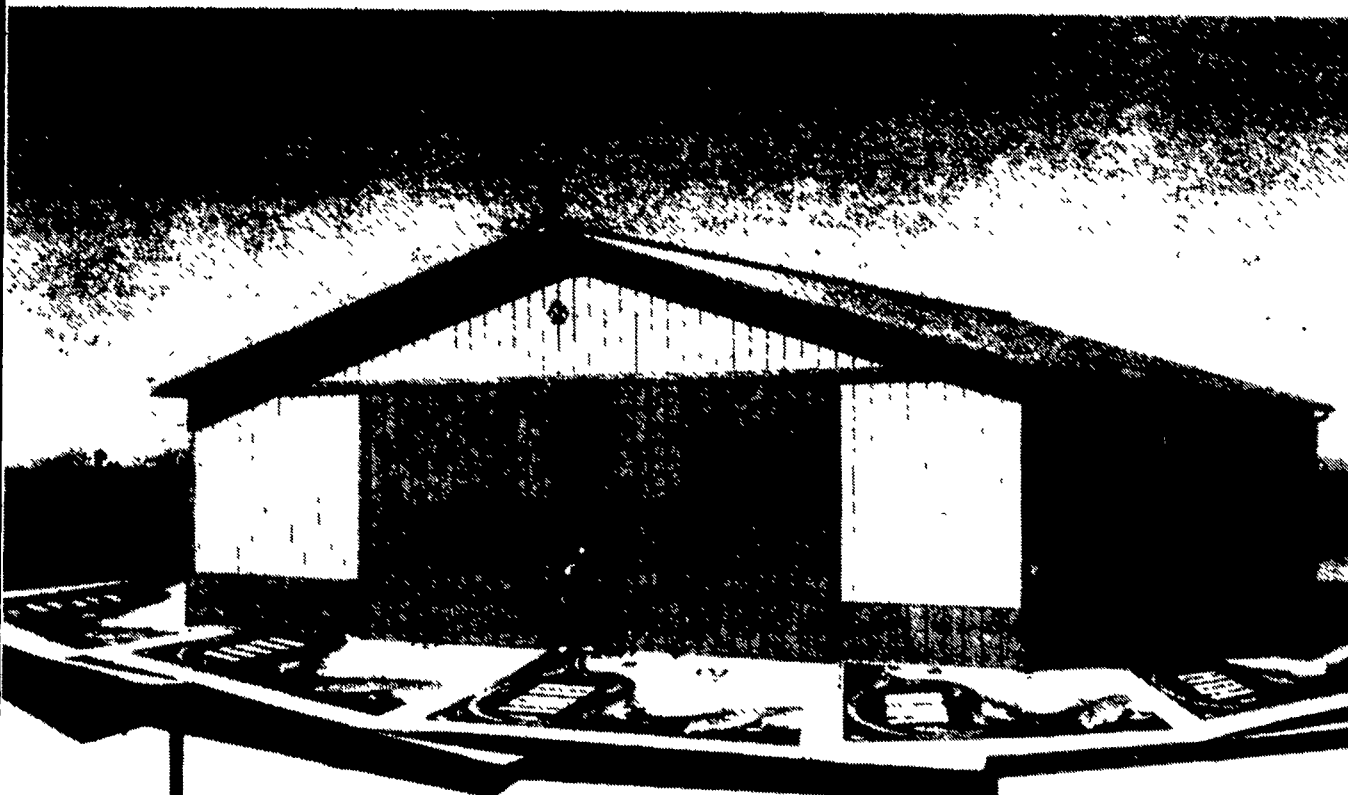
and hit the paper. On a windy day, it's fun to simply stand near a porch railing, holding the streamer and watch it twist and twirl in the breeze.

If you're up for a workout with your two-year-old, try this jumping game. It requires strength, balance, and coordination (both yours and your toddler's). Find a box or block that is strong enough to support your child's weight. Stand her on the box and take both her hands in yours. Then call, "Ready, set, GO!" and help her jump off the box. You want your arms to be at her shoulder height so that when she lands, she's really supporting her own weight and you're just steadying her. Like most toddler fun, this one they'll want to do again and again.

When you finally come back inside and need to calm down (or for those grayer days) be sure to have lots of toddler friendly toys around like push-pull toys, stacking blocks, large spools, simple puzzles, sturdy picture books, a pounding bench, and a play telephone. With these supplies and quick ideas, your time with toddlers is sure to be rewarding.

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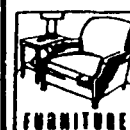
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