

## Stage 4: Organized Communication and Problem Solving

9-18 Months

Goal: Using a series of interactive emotional signals or gestures to communicate.

### Stage 4 Do's and Dont's

- **Do** engage in long chains of interaction around all your toddler's interests
- **Do** make a point of exploring a range of feelings: pleasure, excitement, curiosity, closeness, anger, defiance, and limit setting.
- **Do** challenge your toddler to experience different feelings in the same play session so she can make various feelings part of who she is.
- **Do** let your toddler know what you expect in terms of behavior, much as a corner policeman directs traffic. Use expressive facial expressions, body postures and vocal tones.
- **Do** challenge your child to solve more and more complex problems, like finding you in a hide-and-seek game.
- **Do** challenge your toddler to use her gestures to show you what she wants.
- **Don't** label your child as good or bad.
- **Don't** focus only on playing with blocks, puzzles, or cause-and-effect toys.
- **Don't** become preoccupied with teaching your toddler about discipline and controlling her behavior.

### Learning How to Solve Problems

Challenge your toddler to interact with you to solve problems- not only those that she wants to figure out on her own, but also those that you present to her. Exchange many gestures as the two of you problem-solve, including sounds or words and actions such as pulling each other in various directions.

### Games to help your child master Stage 4:

- **The Working-Together Game**  
Note your toddler's natural interest in various toys, such as dolls, stuffed animals, trucks, balls, etc., and create a problem involving a favorite toy that she needs your help to solve. For example, you might have a favorite teddy bear "run away" and "climb" to a high shelf. Your child will have to raise her arms to reach, and gesture for you to pick her up to extend her reach, and you will gladly comply. Such a simple game will involve opening and closing many circles of communication while solving a problem at the same time.
- **Copycat Game**  
Copy your toddler's sounds and gestures, and see if you can entice her to mirror all of your funny faces, sounds, movements and dance steps. Eventually, add words to the game and then use the words in a purposeful manner to help her meet a need, for example, by saying "Juice" or "Open!"