

# Tales from The Totem Pole: 1-2 years



**T**oby has been coming to the nursery for six months since his mother went back to part-time work when he was 14 months old. He has settled in well, developing a good relationship with Penny, his main carer. Saying goodbye in the morning is obviously more difficult for his mother than it is for him! Penny has seen him develop from crawling to walking in the last few weeks, although he is still happy to spend much of his time sitting down and exploring the world within easy reach.

**LITTLE POINTER:** Just as children that are happy at nursery can find it hard to say goodbye to their parents, parents that hold the setting in high regard can be sad to say goodbye to their babies.

Penny has no concerns about Toby's development; he is well-nourished and has been feeding himself from an early age. He obviously understands a lot of what is said to him and responds well to speech, pointing to the relevant picture while looking at books with Penny, or fetching his shoes when she mentions going outside. His mother, however, is concerned that he is yet to utter a single word. Penny has pointed out that his development is within normal limits and advised her not to compare him to other children; she nevertheless continues to worry.

A popular activity with all the babies is song

time; as soon as the adults spread out the special mat they become excited. Once settled, a basket is offered to each child in turn. Bella chooses the quoit – the prop for *Wheels on the Bus*. Everyone is given a quoit and they sing the song, the babies using gross motor movements to move the quoits up and down. Penny watches Toby closely, noticing that he enjoys the activity and bounces up and down rhythmically as he moves his quoit but makes very little sound.

When Toby is offered the basket, he chooses a shoe. Shoes are given to all of the children and together they sing:

"Toby's got his shoes on,  
Hip hip hooray!  
Toby's got his shoes on and is going out to play!"

**LITTLE POINTER:** Activities such as this are a valuable part of the babies' day, as they combine a reassuring sense of order and routine, but also give them choices.

## A quiet word

Later, Toby brings Penny the special book that Penny and his parents have made about him. He snuggles up on her lap as she turns the pages and talks about the pictures. Towards the end she finds that his mother has put in a

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photograph of his first pair of shoes, next to a photocopy of a page from his favourite nursery rhyme book. Toby points excitedly to the picture and to his own feet in recognition and then settles down to let Penny read him the rhyme.

She begins: "There was an old woman who lived in a..."

Suddenly she has a hunch and stops. There is a pregnant silence, and then a quiet little voice says... "Shoe!"

Although Penny is very excited by this latest breakthrough in Toby's development and can hardly wait to share it with his mother, she remembers how hard she finds leaving her son at nursery. She realises that anxious as she is, it would still make her sad to have missed Toby's first word. Instead, when it is home-time, Penny touches her lightly on the hand. "You know" she says, "I've been doing this job a long time, and I honestly don't think you have anything to worry about. I have a feeling that Toby will start talking very soon indeed..."

**LITTLE POINTER:** While the debate rages about how much we should share with parents when important milestones are met, it is perhaps more important for nursery staff to know the families that they are working with well enough to meet their individual needs.

## find out more

Mary is an early years consultant and trainer, and has worked across the private, public and voluntary sectors, including management roles in Barnardo's and Sure Start programmes. She is the founder of The Totem Pole early years training and resource centre, and last September won 'Trainer of the Year' at the 2011 Nursery World Awards. Visit [thetotempole.co.uk](http://thetotempole.co.uk) or call 01476 578 200.