



FIGURE 3.3 Milestones: Development of self-control

Birth to Approximately 12 months

- Infants are *not* capable of self-control (Kopp, 1981). The reflex movements of the first several months of life give way to voluntary motor acts such as reaching and grasping, but infants do not consciously control these movements.
- This is a time to learn that the self is separate from other people, the very first step on the road to self-control.

Between Age 1 and Age 2

- Children begin to be able to start, stop, change, or maintain motor acts or emotional signals.
- They demonstrate an emerging awareness of the demands made on children by caregivers.
- Communication skills become more sophisticated, enabling a child to understand another person's instructions and modeling.
- Caregivers usually discover that children this age are ready to follow an adult's lead.

At Approximately 24 Months

- Children can recall what someone has said or done.
- They can represent experiences.
- These new abilities help children make the transition to developing self-control.
- At this stage, however, children have only a limited ability to control themselves, that is, to wait for their turn or to delay gratification.

At About 3 Years

- Children can use strategies to help them delay gratification.
- These strategies set the stage for better self-control. Kopp (1981) did research with groups of 18-, 24-, and 36-month-old children to find out how they differ in their use of strategies to better tolerate delay. Researchers placed raisins under a cup, and the child being tested was told not to eat them. The older children spontaneously did things to distract themselves, such as singing, talking, sitting on their hands, or looking away. Younger children benefited from instructions on using delaying strategies, but they did not use them automatically.

EXAMPLE Larry took a block from Jordan's structure. Jordan resisted his usual urge to slug Larry and used words as his teacher suggested: "Larry, I was using that block. Give it back!"

- **Tolerate frustration.** A child would be able to endure disappointment, irritation, or aggravation. We can help children with this in many ways, such as by giving them guidance with seemingly small things—finding one's favorite ice cream flavor, or having to wait for a turn at the computer.
- **Postpone immediate gratification.** This refers to putting off a pleasurable activity, such as having coffee with friends, until after completing an important task, such as studying for an exam. Children are simply not as skilled at delaying gratification as are adults. They must learn how to do it and then must want to try it. Even older children need help figuring out when it is important to put off until later something that they want right now.
- **Set a plan in motion and carry it out.** David and Michael, second graders, planned how to build a model of a farm, drew the plans, then built their model. It took them several days to complete their project.

How Self-Control Evolves Self-control emerges "from the outside to the inside," slowly, and haltingly.

- **Self-control evolves "from the outside to the inside."** Responsible adults take responsibility for remembering things for an infant and reminding a toddler to hold the kitten gently, thereby

