

PRACTICE GUIDE

Physical and cognitive developmental milestones

Developmental milestones

Developmental milestones are behaviours or skills seen in infants and children that change as they grow and develop. The following table is a guide only. Whilst there is a normal range in which most children will reach their milestones, some children may grow and develop outside of these ranges and still be considered to be developing within the normal range.

Developmental milestones

| Age level | Physical skills | Cognitive skills |
|--------------|---|---|
| 0 – 1 year | | |
| 0 – 4 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifts head when on abdomen • Head momentarily to midline when on back • Equal extremity movements. Sucking reflex • Grasp reflex (no reaching, and hand usually closed) • Increasing body tone and stabilization of basic body functions, growing capacity to stay awake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks at face transiently • By three to four weeks, smiles selectively to mother's voice and human voice leads to quieting of cries • Cries if uncomfortable or in state of tension—undifferentiated initially, but gradually varies with cause (e.g. hungry, tired, pain). |
| 1 – 3 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head to 45 degrees, when on abdomen, erect when sitting. • Bears fraction of weight when held in standing position • Uses vocalizations • By two-three months, grasps rattle briefly • Puts hands together • By three to four months, may reach for objects, suck hand or fingers • Head is more frequently to midline, and comes to 90 degrees when on abdomen • Rolls side to back | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased babbles and coos • Most laugh out loud, squeal, and giggle • Smiles responsively to human face • Increased attention span. |
| 3 – 6 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolls from abdomen to back then from back to abdomen • Bears increasing weight when held upright • No head lag when pulled to sitting • Head, eyes, and hands work well together to reach for toys or human face | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneously vocalizes vowels, consonants, a few syllables • Responds to tone and inflection of voice • Smiles at image in mirror |

| | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspects objects with hands, eyes, and mouth • Takes solid food well | |
| 6 – 9 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits without support • Increasingly mobile • Stands while holding on • Pushes self to sitting • Grasps objects, transfers objects. • Feeds self finger foods, puts feet to mouth, may hold own bottle • Approaching nine months, pulls self to standing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says mama/dada randomly • Begins to imitate speech sounds • Many syllable sounds (ma, ba, da) • Responds to own name, beginning responsiveness to “no, no” |
| 9 – 12 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crawls with left-right alternation. Walks with support, stands momentarily, and takes a few uneasy steps • Most have neat pincer grasp • Bangs together objects held in each hand. • Plays pat-a-cake • Fifty percent drink from cup by themselves | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imitates speech sounds • Correctly uses mama/dada • Understands simple command (“give it to me”) • Beginning sense of humour |
| 1 – 2 years | | |
| 12 – 15 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands well alone, walks well, stoops, and recovers • Neat pincer grasp • Can put a ball in a box and a raisin in a bottle • Can build a tower of two cubes • Spontaneous scribbling with palmer grasp of crayon • Fifty percent use spoon with minimal spilling • Most drink from cup unassisted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three to five word vocabulary. • Uses gestures to communicate • Vocalizing replaces crying for attention • Understands “no” • Shakes head for no • Sense of me and mine • Fifty percent imitate household tasks |
| 15 – 18 months | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runs stiffly • Walks backwards • Attempts to kick • Climbs on furniture • Crude page turning • Most use spoon well • Fifty percent can help in little household tasks • Most can take off pieces of clothing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary of about ten words • Uses words with gestures • Fifty percent begin to point to body parts • Vocalizes “no” • Points to pictures of common objects (e.g. dog) • Knows when something is complete such as waving bye-bye • Knows where things are or belong • More claiming of mine • Beginning distinction of you and me, but does not perceive others as individuals like self • Resistant to change in routine • Autonomy expressed as defiance • Words are not important discipline techniques |

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| <p>18 – 24 months</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While holding on, walks upstairs, then walks down stairs • Turns single page. • Builds tower of four to six cubes. • Most copy vertical line • Strings beads or places rings on spindles • Helps dress and undress self • Can wash and dry hands • Most can do simple household tasks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markedly increased vocabulary (mostly nouns) • Consistently points to body parts • Combines two to three words • Names pictures of common objects • Follows simple directions • Matches colours frequently, but uses colour names randomly • Uses number words randomly • May indicate wet or dirty nappy • Asks for food or drink • Understands and asks for “another.” • Mimics real life situations during play • Self-centred, but distinguishes between self and others • Conscious of family group |
| <p>2 years and over</p> | | |
| <p>2 years</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumps in place with both feet • Most throw ball overhead • Can put on clothing-most can dress self with supervision • Can use zippers, buckles, and buttons • Most are toilet trained • Good steering on push toys • Can carry a breakable object • Can pour from one container to another • By 30 months, alternates feet on stair climbing, pedals tricycle, briefly stands on one foot; builds eight-cube tower, proper pencil grasp, imitates horizontal line | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns to avoid simple hazards (stairs, stoves, etc.) • By 30 months, vocabulary reaches 300 words • Identity in terms of names, gender, and place in family are well established • Uses “I,” but often refers to self by first name • Phrases and three to four word sentences • By 36 months, vocabulary reaches 1,000 words, including more verbs and some adjectives. • Understands big versus little • Interest in learning, often asking “What’s that?” |
| <p>3 years</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most stand on one foot for five seconds • Most hop on one foot. Most broad-jump • Toilets self during daytime • By 38 months, draws picture and names it • Draws two-part person | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counts to three • Tells age by holding up fingers. • Tells first and last name (foster children may not know last name) • Most answer simple questions. • Repeats three or four digits or nonsense syllables • Readiness to conform to spoken word • Understands turn-taking • Uses language to resist • Can bargain with peers • Understands long versus short • By end of third year, vocabulary is 1,500 words |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <p>4 – 5 years</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most hop on one foot, skip alternating feet, balance on one foot for ten seconds, catch bounced ball, do forward heel-toe walk • Draws three-part person • Copies triangles, linear figures (may have continued difficulty with diagonals, and may have rare reversals) • Most dress independently other than back buttons and shoe tying • Washes face and brushes teeth • Laces shoes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By end of fifth year, vocabulary is over 2,000 words including adverbs and prepositions • Understands opposites (day/night) • Understands consecutive concepts (big, bigger, biggest) • Lots of why and how questions • Correctly counts five to ten objects • Correctly identifies colours • Dogmatic and dramatic. • May argue about parental requests • Good imagination • Likes silly rhymes, sounds, names • Beginning sense of time in terms of yesterday, tomorrow, sense of how long an hour is • Increasingly elaborate answers to questions |
| <p>6 – 11 years</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practices, refines, and masters complex gross and fine motor and perceptual skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete operational thinking replaces egocentric cognition. • Thinking becomes more logical and rational • Develops ability to understand others' perspectives |
| <p>12 – 17 years</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physiological changes at puberty • promote rapid growth, maturity of sexual organs, and development of secondary sex characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In early adolescence, precursors to formal operational thinking appear, including limited ability to think hypothetically and to take multiple perspectives • During middle and late adolescence, formal operational thinking becomes well developed and integrated in a significant percentage of adolescents |

Adapted from "Developmental Milestones Summary," Institute for Human Services, (1990); "Developmental Charts" provided by Jeffery Lusko, Orchards Children's Service, Southfield, MI; "Early Childhood Development from two to six years of age," Cassie Landers, UNICEF HOUSE, New York.

Version history

Last reviewed: September 2019