# Developmental Milestones In Children

## Introduction

*From birth through six years of age, the child goes through physical, language, social, emotional and mental changes. Although no two children grow at the same rate, experts agree that there are normal signs of development. In this lecture we will explore the important milestones the child goes throughduring his/her development in the first five years of life. Simple checklists are provided that one can use to become aware of and appreciate the dramatic changes that are occurring in the child.*

## Developmental Milestones for children between birth and eighteen Month

What changes are you likely to see happening in a child from the time he/she is born to around the time he/she is one year and six months?

*Milestones in the first month of life*

At the very beginning from birth, it may seem that the baby does nothing but eat, sleep, cry, and fill his diapers. But by the end of the first month, he will be much more alert and responsive. Gradually he will begin moving his body more smoothly and with much greater coordination especially in getting his hand to his mouth. You will realize that he listens when you speak, watches you as you hold him, and occasionally moves his own body to respond to you or attract your attention. Some of the milestones to look for in the child in the first one month include:

*Movement Milestones*: The child makes jerky, quivering arm thrusts, bringing hands within the range of eyes and mouth, moves the head from side to side while lying on the stomach. The head flops backward if unsupported, keeps the hands in tight fists and has strong reflex movements.

*Visual and Hearing Milestones:* The child focuses 8 to 12 inches (20.3 to 30.4 cm) away. The eyes wander and occasionally close, he prefers black and white or high contrast patterns and also prefers the human face to all other patterns. Hearing is fully mature and the childrecognizes some sounds and may turn towards familiar sounds and voices.

*Smell and Touch Milestones:* The child prefers sweet smells, avoids bitter or acidic smells, recognizes the scent of his own mother’s breast milk, prefers soft to coarse sensations and dislikes rough or abrupt handling.

## Identifying children with developmental delay in the first few months

These are some of the things you expect to see to know that a child is developing well. But how would you tell that a child is not developing normally? The following signs may be an indicator that the child is not developing well or could be having complications. If, during the second, third, or fourth week of the baby’s life, he/she shows any of the following signs of developmental delay, notify the health provider. Sucks poorly and feeds slowly. He/she does not blink when shown a bright light. Does not focus and follow a nearby object moving side to side. Rarely moves arms and legs; or seems stiff. Seemexcessively loose in the limbs, or floppy. Lower jaw trembles constantly, even when not crying or excited and does not respond to loud sounds.

*Milestones for Two to Five Months old Babies*

When comparing the child’s accomplishments to a developmental chart remember to use the child’s correct age.  If the baby went home from the hospital in generally good health and is able to feed from the breast or bottle the mother may expect that sometime from two to five months the child will begin to; smile and coo, watch a person’s face intently and follow people and objects with his/her eyes. He will laugh out loudly, lift his/her head and chest when on the stomach and independently hold the head steady when pulled to sit. The baby may grasp a rattle placed in her hand and startle when he/she hears a loud sound.

*Milestones for Six to Nine Months old baby*

If the baby has been generally healthy since he/she came home from the hospital, then he/she will; babble and begin to combine vowel consonant sounds like, "dadadada, mamamama." The baby will turn to locate the source of a sound. He/she will respond to his/her name, roll over, and move from sitting with support to sitting independently. He/she will transfer objects from hand to hand, support his/her weight on his/her feet when held in an upright position. The baby will use the thumb and fingers to pick up small objects (rather than using the whole hand in a raking motion). He/she will crawl supporting her weight on her hands and knees rather than pulling herself along in a semi lying position.

*Milestones for Ten to Twelve Months old baby*

Between ages ten to twelve months, the baby is able to carry out a simple action on verbal request. For example, wave "bye" when he/she hears the word. The baby no longer has to see someone wave first. The child purposefully says "mama" and/or "dada" as a greeting or to call a parent. He/she play with an object with both hands while sitting independently. The child can independently move across the floor to get a desired object. He/she pulls to stand and cruise holding onto furniture or an adult's hand. He/she picks up small objects with a thumb and fingers. He/she tries to communicate by pointing or reaching for what he/she wants. The child turns the pages of a board or thick plastic book. He/she visually and manually explore toys, revealing a growing curiosity. He/she indicate recognition of familiar people by facial expression or by physically approaching the familiar person. The child uses both hands equally well.

*Milestones Thirteen to Eighteen Months*

By thirteen to eighteen months, the child is able to scribble with a large crayon (if he/she can keep from putting it in her mouth), walk alone with heels flat on the floor, feed him/herself with fingers and begin to try using a spoon. The child can walk up stairs with one hand held. He/she uses a vocabulary of four to ten words. He/she is able to follow simple verbal directions to perform a single task. For example, if mama says "give me the ball". The child will give her the ball. He/she coordinates the use of both hands well. For example, he/she holds a container in one hand while putting something into it with the other and responds to his/her name. The child talks in long sentences as if holding an understandable conversation with an adult. He/she points to at least two pictures on request. He/she uses the thumb and first finger easily to pick up a very small object. He/she can throw a ball easily.

*Developmental Milestones over 18 months*

Beyond infancy, it becomes difficult to make a list of definitive developmental milestones that must be met by a certain date.  The range of how children do things and when they accomplish developmental tasks becomes broader, largely due to the increasing influence of culture and experience.  This makes it hard to put this section into the format we have used for the developmental milestones discussed above. Therefore, I will provide you with several different ways to look at the development of young children over 18 months. I hope you will find this useful in deciding how to address developmental difficulties the child may experience.

*Motor Skills***:** At this age the child likes to pull, push, and dump things. He/she pulls off the hat and socks turn pages in a book and stack 2 blocks. He/she may carry a stuffed animal or doll, scribble with crayons, walk without help and run stiffly with eyes on the ground.

*Sensory and Thinking Skills***:** The child identifies an object in a picture book, laughs at silly actions as in wearing a bowl as a hat. He/she looks for objects that are out of sight and put a round lid on a round pot. He or she may follow simple one step directions like “give me the doll” and solve problems by trial and error.

*Language and Social Skills***:** In terms of language development, the child says 8-10 words that one can understand. He or she looks at a person who is talking to him and may ask specifically for his/her mother/father. The child uses "hi," "bye," and "please," with reminders. He/she protest when frustrated and asks for something by pointing or by using one word. The child is able to direct another person’s attention to an object or action. He/she becomes anxious when separated from parents and seeks their attention. The child brings toys to share with a parent or to act out a familiar activity in play (as in pretending to take a bath). He/she plays alone on the floor with toys, compete with other children for toys, recognize him/her in a mirror or in pictures and seem selfish at times.

## Developmental milestones in the second year

*Motor Skills***:** By two years, the child is able to drink from a straw, feed himself with a spoon, help in washing hands, and build a tower of 3 to 4 blocks. He/she can toss or roll a large ball, open cabinets, drawers, and boxes and operate a mechanical toy. The child can bend over to pick up a toy and not fall. He/she walk up steps with help and take steps backward.

*Sensory and Thinking Skills:* In terms of sensory and thinking skills, the child likes to take things apart, explore the surroundings and points to 5 to 6 parts of a doll when asked.

*Language and Social Skills*: Linguistically the child has a vocabulary of several hundred words. He/she uses 2 to 3 word sentences, say names of objects, asks for information about any object for instance the child may ask, "Shoe?" while pointing to shoe box. The child hums or tries to sing, listen to short rhymes and like to imitate parents. Sometimes the child get angry and have temper tantrums. He/she act shy around strangers and comfort a distressed friend or parent. He/she take turns in play with other children, treat a doll or stuffed animal as though it were alive and apply pretend action to others as in pretending to feed a doll. The child show awareness of parental approval or disapproval for her actions, refer to self by name and use "me" and "mine" and verbalize his desires and feelings e.g. the child may say "I want cookie". He/she laughs at silly labeling of objects and events as in calling a nose an ear. He/she enjoys looking at one book over and over and point to eyes, ears, or nose when asked.

## Developmental milestones in the third year

With the child’s third birthday, the “terrible twos” are officially over and the “magic years” of three and four begin a time when the child’s world will be dominated by fantasy and vivid imagination. During the next two years, he will mature in many areas. Here are some milestones to look for.

*Motor Skills:* By three years, the child feeds him/herself with some spilling. He/she open doors, hold a glass in one hand, hold a crayon well, wash and dry hands by himself and fold a paper, if shown how. He/she can build a tower of 54 blocks, throw a ball overhead, try to catch a large ball, put on shoes but not tie laces, dress him/herself with help and use the toilet with some help. The child can walk up steps, alternating feet, walk on tiptoes if shown how, walk in a straight line, kick a ball forward, jump with both feet and pedal a tricycle.

*Movement milestones:*The child hops and stands on one foot up to five seconds. He/she goes upstairs and downstairs without support, kicks the ball forward, throws a ball overhand, catches a bounced ball most of the time and moves forward and backward with agility

*Milestones in hand and finger skills:*The child copies square shapes and draws a person with two to four body parts. He/she uses scissors, draws circles and squares and begins to copy some capital letters.

*Sensory and Thinking Skills:*In terms of sensory and thinking skills, the child recognizes sounds in the environment. He/she pays attention for about 3 minutes, remembers what happened yesterday, knows what is food and what is not food and know some numbers (but not always in the right order). He/she knows where things usually belong, understands what "1" is, understand "now," "soon," and "later". He/she substitutes one object for another in pretend play as in pretending a block is a "car". He/she laughs at silly ideas like "milking" a dog, looks through a book alone, match circles and squares, match an object to a picture of that object, match objects that have same function as in putting a cup and plate together and count 2 to 3 objects. The child avoids some dangers like a hot stove or a moving car and follows simple one step commands. For instance, if a child was playing with a sharp knife and mama tells him/her “put the knife into the utensil tray” the child will stop playing with the knife and put it where it is supposed to be.

The child correctly names some colours and understands the concept of counting and may know a few numbers. He/she approaches problems from a single point of view. Begins to have a clearer sense of time and follows three part commands. He/she recalls parts of a story, understands the concept of same/different and engages in fantasy play

*Language milestones:* The child uses 3 to 5 word sentences, ask short questions, use plurals as in "dogs," "cars," "hats" and name at least 10 familiar objects. He/she repeat simple rhymes, name at least one colour correctly and he/she asks to use the toilet almost every time and enjoy being read to. He/she knows his/her first and last name. The child understands "I," "you," "he," and "she", believe everything centers around him for instance, a child may say that, "if I hide my eyes, no one will see me". He/she can answer a question on whether he/she is a boy or girl

The child understands the concepts of “same” and “different”. He/she has mastered some basic rules of grammar, speaks in sentences of five to six words, speaks clearly enough for strangers to understand and tell stories.

*Social and emotional milestones:*In social skills, the child imitates housework or helps with simple tasks, talk about feelings and mental states (e.g., remembering) and demonstrate some shame when caught in a wrongdoing. He/she tries to make others laugh, play spontaneously with two or three children in a group and assign roles in pretend social play.

The child is interested in new experiences, cooperates with other children and plays “Mum” or “Dad”. He/she is increasingly inventive in fantasy play. He/she dresses and undresses and negotiates solutions to conflicts. He/she is more independent, imagines that many unfamiliar images may be “monsters”, views self as a whole person involving body, mind, and feelings and more often cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality.

## Identifying children with developmental delay in the third year

Because each child develops in his own particular manner, it’s impossible to tell exactly when or how he/she will perfect a given skill. The developmental milestones listed in this lecture will give you a general idea of the changes you can expect as the child gets older, but parents should not be alarmed if the child’s development takes a slightly different course. Parents should alert the health care provider, if the child displays any of the following signs of possible developmental delay for this age range.

* The child cannot throw a ball overhand.
* Cannot jump in place. Cannot ride a tricycle.
* Cannot grasp a crayon between thumb and fingers.
* Has difficulty scribbling.
* Cannot stack four blocks.
* Still clings or cries whenever his parents leave him.
* Shows no interest in interactive games.
* Ignores other children.
* Does not respond to people outside the family.
* Does not engage in fantasy play.
* Resists dressing, sleeping, using the toilet.
* Lashes out without any self-control when angry or upset.
* Cannot copy a circle.
* Does not use sentences of more than three words.
* Does not use “me” and “you” appropriately

## Developmental milestones in the fourth and fifth year

Before one knows it, the somehow calm child of three becomes a dynamo energetic, drive, bossiness, and generally out of bounds behavior. A parent may be reminded of the earlier trials and tribulations they went through when he/she was two years. Also obvious during this time is the tremendous spurt of imaginative ideas that spring from children’s minds and mouths. All of this behavior and thinking will help the child build a secure foundation as he emerges into the world of kindergarten. Here are some other milestones to look for.

*Movement milestones:*The child stands on one foot for ten seconds or longer**,** hops, somersaults**,** swings, climbsand may be able to skip

*Milestones in hand and finger skills:* The child copies a triangle and other geometric patterns, draws a person with body and prints some letters. He/she dresses and undresses without assistance, uses a fork, spoon, and sometimes a table knife and usually cares for own toilet needs.

*Language milestones:*The child recalls part of a story, speaks sentences of more than five words, uses future tense, tells longer stories and says name and address.

*Cognitive milestones:*The child can count ten or more objects, correctly names at least four colours, better understands the concept of time and knows about things used every day in the home money, food and appliances.

*Social and emotional milestones:*The child wants to please friends, he/she wants to be like his/her friends and more likely to agree to rules. He/she likes to sing, dance, and act. The child show more independence and may even visit a next door neighbor by him/herself and is aware of sexuality. He/she is able to distinguish fantasy from reality. Sometimes the child is demanding and other times eagerly cooperative

## Identifying developmental delays in the fourth and fifth year

Because each child develops in his/her own particular manner, it’s impossible to predict exactly when or how the preschooler will perfect a given skill. The developmental milestones listed here will give you a general idea of the changes you can expect as the child gets older, but parents should not be alarmed if the child’s development takes a slightly different course. As mentioned earlier, alert a health care provider, if the child displays any of the following signs of possible developmental delay for this age range. If the child:

* Exhibits extremely fearful or timid behavior.
* Exhibits extremely aggressive behavior.
* Is unable to separate from parents without major protest.
* Is easily distracted and unable to concentrate on any single activity for more than five minutes.
* Shows little interest in playing with other children.
* Refuses to respond to people in general, or responds only superficially.
* Rarely uses fantasy or imitation in play.
* Seems unhappy or sad much of the time.
* Does not engage in a variety of activities.
* Avoids or seems aloof with other children and adults.
* Doesn’t express a wide range of emotions.
* Has trouble eating, sleeping, or using the toilet.
* Can’t differentiate between fantasy and reality.
* Seems unusually passive.
* Cannot understand two-part commands using prepositions (“Put the cup on the table”; “Get the ball under the couch”).
* Can’t correctly give his/her first and last name.
* Doesn’t use plurals or past tense properly when speaking.
* Doesn’t talk about her daily activities and experiences.
* Cannot build a tower of six to eight blocks.
* Seems uncomfortable holding a crayon.
* Has trouble taking off his/her clothing.
* Cannot brush her teeth efficiently.
* Cannot wash and dry his/her hands.

## Summary

In this article, we have looked at the different skills children acquire at different ages. These milestones are categorized into physical, social, mental, language and emotional development. We have also looked at the developmental delays that parents/care givers could look for to establish whether their children are developing health problems so as to seek for health care support at the right time.

## Reference

ACT (n.d). Achild’s developmental milestones.

http://stnickcenter.org/images/uploads/PDF/child\_dev\_milestone.pdf

Powell, J. and Smith, C.A. (1994). The 1st year. In *Developmental milestones: A guide for parents*. Manhattan, KS: KansasStateUniversity Cooperative Extension Service.

The Institute for Human Services for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (2007). Developmental milestones chart.

Virginia Department of Social Services (2008). Milestones of child development: Learning and development from birth to kindergarten. Virginia Early Childhood Development Project.