

Tip Sheets

Developmental Milestones: What Shapes a Child's Growth

Child development is fundamental to community and economic development. Capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society.

What is Typical/Atypical Development?

Children learn throughout their lives, starting at birth. In addition to general health, **a child's growth is physical, social, and mental.** These areas of growth and children's general health are important when monitoring overall development.

Most developmental tracking and observation have focused on motor, language, and cognitive development, but social and emotional development play an important role as well.

Milestones help distinguish if children are following a typical developmental path. If not, these delayed or missed milestones give us cues as to whether a screening/assessment might be necessary.

Developmental Milestones Defined

There are developmental milestones, supported by research, that indicate when most children typically are proficient in certain areas and activities and which new milestones will follow.

Developmental milestones are defined as the major accomplishments in the infant and preschool years, usually within a range of years or months according to the average age at which children reach those destinations on the path of development.

Developmental milestones are widely recognized by early childhood experts as the process by which children gain a skill and then move on to the next level of that skill or a corresponding skill. One must walk before he can run and babble before he can speak.

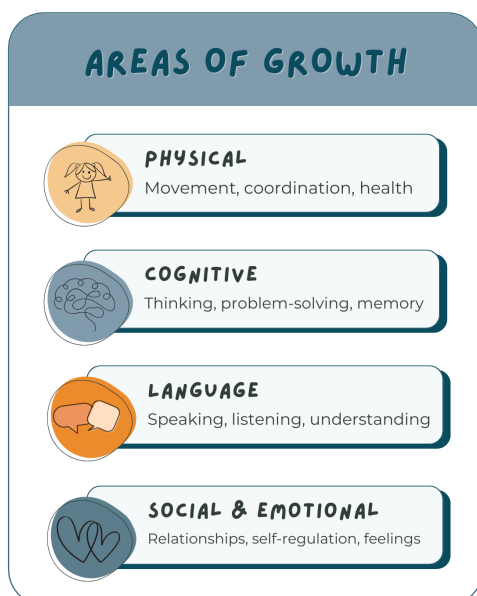
Mastery of Skills

Physical development is sequential and builds on what child developmental professionals refer to as mastery of skills (walking before running). The term mastery refers to both skill development and adeptness. Mastery crosses developmental domains and denotes a proficiency in physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Croft, 2007).

Factors Influencing Developmental Milestones

Family life

Some families may live in poverty, lack sufficient nutrition, or have less time than others to spend one-on-one with their children.



Family culture

Culture also plays a significant role in how and when milestones are reached by children as some cultures emphasize interdependence over independent skill-building or may not prioritize toilet training or self-feeding at the same age as is typical in American culture.

Developmental milestones represent European-American values in their origin and so a child may seem delayed when, in fact, they are right on the mark according to her own cultural norms.

Quality of Early Childhood Education

Some children may be in poor quality Early Childhood Education programs for ten or more hours a day. A child's opportunities for development can be hindered by these influences.

Disability

Disabilities can impact milestones in many ways; for example, a delay in communication skills or language acquisition can be present if a child is deaf or has a hearing impairment, a child may have cognitive delays based on a brain injury or neurological disorder or a child's physical disability may impact his motor development.

If a child's disability has not been identified by the time they are enrolled in Early Childhood Education, then it may be the sharp eye of the provider, using the tools of observation and recording, who first brings developmental concerns to the family.

The Educator's Role

Our awareness and observations are essential in the identification of red flags of concern and a need for increased monitoring of the child's development, which may lead to a referral for a formal screening or further evaluation.

The sooner early intervention occurs, the better the outcomes will be for the child and will increase the likelihood the child will be ready to learn and be successful when they enter school.

We need to monitor development early on and can do this through observing how a child plays, learns, speaks, and behaves. While all children are unique, there are some key indicators or "red flags" that we can monitor.

Red flags

A red flag is a behavior that signals the need to stop, look, and think about a child's development and then follow up with further observation and documentation. Some examples of red flags are:

- Regression or loss of skills
- Sensory aversions
- Physiological concerns
- Little or no eye contact
- No response to name
- Unusual motor behaviors or motor planning

The full list of developmental milestones can be found on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website: <https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/milestones>.

Additional Resource

Harvard's Center on the Developing Child | Core Concepts of Development
<https://youtu.be/WO-CB2nsgTA>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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