

The 5 Areas of Child Development

Introduction

There are 5 areas of childhood development examined in each evaluation of an infant or toddler suspected of having a developmental delay or disability. The 5 areas are (1) Cognitive Development; (2) Physical Development; (3) Communication Development; (4) Social or Emotional Development; and (5) Adaptive Development. This issue of **NASET's Parent Teacher Conference Handout** will provide a quick synopsis of each of the 5 developmental areas.

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There are 5 areas of childhood development examined in each evaluation of an infant or toddler suspected of having a developmental delay or disability. Here's a quick synopsis of those 5 developmental areas.

1. Cognitive Development

Cognitive development refers to children's ability to learn and solve problems, which typically grows dramatically between birth and 3 years old as children begin to make sense of the world around them. Developmental milestones of cognitive development include:

- paying attention to faces and recognizing familiar people (2 months);
- showing curiosity and trying to get to objects that are out of reach (6 months);
- knowing what ordinary things are for (e.g., spoon, toothbrush, comb) and being able to follow one-step commands (such as "sit down") (18 months).

2. Physical Development

Physical development includes a child's gross motor skills, fine motor skills, and sensory and perceptual abilities.

Fine motor skills include the child's ability to use small muscles, specifically in the hands and fingers, to pick up small objects, hold a spoon, turn pages in a book, or use a crayon to draw.

Gross motor skills refer to the child's ability to use large muscles. Large muscle development will help a baby learn to sit up without support, crawl or roll from one place to another, and pull up to a stand by holding onto furniture.

Sensory and perceptual abilities include vision and hearing.

Interestingly, motor skills development in children generally progresses from head to toe, with babies usually gaining control of their body parts in the following order:

- head and neck at about 2 months of age;
- arms and hands, with grasping at about 3 months;
- trunk, with sitting well by about 8 months;
- legs and feet, with most children walking by 14 or 15 months.

3. Communication Development

At issue in this developmental area is the child's ability to both understand and use language to communicate with people and express his or her own emotions. Typical milestone behaviors at different ages include:

- babbling (4 months);
- responding to sounds by making sounds and responding to own name (6 months);
- copying actions that others make, such as shaking the head to indicate "no" or waving "bye-bye" (9 months), and
- using a few simple words (18 months).

By age 3, a child may know as many as 900 words.

4. Social or Emotional Development

Zero to Three gives an excellent summary of the social-emotional domain, as follows:

Making friends. Showing anger in a healthy way. Figuring out conflicts peacefully. Taking care of someone who has been hurt. Waiting patiently. Following rules. Enjoying the company of others. All of these qualities, and more, describe the arc of healthy social-emotional development. Like any skill, young children develop these abilities in small steps over time.

Examples of typical milestones of social-emotional development include:

- smiling spontaneously, especially at people (4 months);
- clinging to familiar adults and perhaps being afraid of strangers (9 months);
- having temper tantrums (18 months); and
- playing mainly beside other children, but beginning to include other children, such as in chase games (2 years).

5. Adaptive Development

The ability to adapt to changing circumstances and take care of oneself is a vital skill in life, to be sure. For babies and toddlers, adaptive development includes learning the self-help skills involved in daily living—to eat independently (with fingers at first, then with a spoon), to get dressed, use the toilet, and see to basic hygiene and grooming. Not surprisingly, as children acquire more adaptive skills, they become more independent.

Need more info about the 5 developmental areas?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Developmental Milestones

English | <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>

Spanish | <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/Spanish/actearly/milestones/index.html>

Our Very Own Parent Center Hub

Developmental Milestones

English | <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/milestones/>

Spanish | <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/hitos/>