

Milestones

(birth to 4 years)

PARENTING
BABIES,
TODDLERS
AND YOUNG
CHILDREN

ParentLink
guides use 'he'
and 'she' in turn.
Change to suit
your child's sex.

Most parents want to know if their baby or toddler is developing 'normally'. The following is a basic guide as to what you might expect for the first four years of life (often called developmental milestones). Each heading gives an idea about what a baby or child will usually do at that age. There will be individual differences, and the differences in the way you care for your child can sometimes have an effect on what your child does. If you are worried that your child seems 'out-of-step' with others of the same age, talk with a child health nurse or a doctor. Another opinion will help to either reassure you or enable you to get help early.

Birth–3 months

Relationships and feelings (often called social and emotional development)

- Can feel, but not yet able to think—will pick up your feelings.
- Watches parent's face when being talked to by 4–8 weeks.
- Smiles by 5–7 weeks.
- Starts to laugh aloud by 3 months.

Out of step?

- No social smile by 8 weeks.
- Does not usually calm down, at least for a little while, when picked up.

Doing, seeing and hearing (often called motor skills, vision and hearing)

- When cheek is touched, turns to that side to suck from birth.
- Blinks at sudden noises such as hand claps or door slamming from birth.
- May open eyes to normal speech sounds just as she is dozing off from birth.
- Startled by loud sounds by 1 month.
- Begins to notice sudden long sounds when they start and stop (for example, vacuum cleaner) by 1 month.
- Lifts head when lying on tummy by 4–8 weeks—never leave baby alone on tummy.
- Kicks both legs strongly by 2 months.
- Arms, fingers and legs automatically move, bend, straighten and bend again.
- Follows a moving light with eyes by 1 month.

- Both eyes move together most of the time by 6 weeks.
- Watches a moving face by 2–3 months.
- Sucks well at the breast or from a bottle.
- Sleep patterns vary greatly.

Out of step?

- Baby is unusually 'floppy' or stiff.
- An arm and leg on one side is obviously different in muscle tone or strength to the other side.
- There is unusually 'good' head control (muscles stiff).
- Fingers are always held in a tight fist.
- Baby is not watching faces by 3 months.
- Baby is not startled by sudden noise.
- Difficulties with feeding beyond 'normal' range—discuss with child health nurse.
- Long periods of crying and continuing difficulties with settling.
- Seems unusually 'good' and not demanding compared to other babies.

Learning to talk (often called speech and language development)

- Makes other sounds besides crying by 2 months.
- Starts to make sounds and 'talk back' by 7–8 weeks.
- Appears to listen to parent's voice and watches the face.

Out of step?

- Not watching the person's face when being spoken to by 3 months.
- Not making little sounds by 3 months.



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3–6 months

Relationships and feelings

- Laughs aloud by 2–4 months.
- Enjoys being played with, laughs and kicks by 4 months.
- Makes eye contact with you and you will be smiling at each other.

Out of step?

- Doesn't seem interested in things around him.
- Doesn't seem to show delight in being with people.
- Doesn't seem to recognise his parent or other familiar people.

Doing, seeing and hearing

- Enjoys watching others doing things.
- Makes eye contact.
- Likes looking at people and bright objects.
- Looks at hands and plays with own fingers by 3 months.
- Can grasp an object when placed in his hand by 3–4 months.
- Rolls over to his side around 5 months (range is 4–6 months).
- Lifts head and chest when lying on his tummy by 4 months—never leave baby alone on tummy.
- Begins to react to familiar situations by smiling, cooing and excited movements.
- Begins to turn head slowly to moderate level of sound (for example, normal speaking voice) by 3 months.
- Should quieten or smile at sound of your voice, even if he cannot see you, by 4 months.
- May turn his head or eyes towards you if you speak as you come from the side or from behind by 4 months.

Out of step?

- Does not open hands or straighten fingers.
- Arms and legs are bent most of the time.
- Is not kicking his legs.
- Does not follow activities with his eyes.
- Does not make eye contact with people.
- Does not turn to look for you when you speak.
- Is not looking to where there is a sound.
- Is not startled by loud noises.
- Unhappy or unsettled most of the time.

Learning to talk:

- Makes lots of little voice sounds.
- Turns head towards a talking person by 5 months.
- Begins babbling then listening, around 3–4 months.
- Takes turn when 'talking' (making sounds) with parents.

Out of step?

- Is not making many voice sounds.

6–9 months

Relationships and feelings

- Knows familiar people and is unsure of strangers.
- At times might not go to people she knows well for a while—but wants the main carer.
- May become distressed when separated from main carer.
- Delights in and plays 'peek-a-boo' games.

Out of step?

- Does not show pleasure when she sees people she knows well.
- Does not make eye contact.
- Cannot be comforted by parent or close carer.

Doing

- Can swap small items from one hand to the other.
- Picks objects up with thumb and one finger.
- Rolls over on to tummy and back again by 7 months.
- Sits without support by 8 months.
- Starts to move around more and can roll and creep on her tummy by 8 months.
- Can move between positions, for example sitting to crawling to sitting by 8 months.
- Can hold a bottle to drink.
- Can start to drink from a cup which is held by an adult, by 8 months.
- Holds a spoon, but cannot use it, by 7 months.
- Shows interest in small objects and reaches out for them.
- Starts to look at and feel objects before taking them to her mouth.
- Looks in the right direction for things that have fallen down.

Out of step?

- Not starting to move around by any means.
- Not interested in and does not reach for objects by 8 months.
- Does not recognise parent or main carer.
- Does not show an interest in surroundings.
- Not interested in new objects.

Hearing and learning to talk

- Should turn immediately to very quiet sounds by 7 months.
- Babbles with sounds like 'da da' and then starts to put these babbling sounds together by 6–7 months.
- Recognises several words, for example, looks for Daddy if 'Daddy' is said.
- Copies sounds made by other people.

Out of step?

- Babbling has not developed further and she does not babble in 'conversation' with others.
- Not turning towards you when calling her name.

9–12 months

Relationships and feelings

- Knows familiar people and starts to withdraw from strangers by 9 months.
- Begins to turn around when his name is called.
- Gives cuddles by 10 months.
- Starts to become anxious if main carer is out of sight.
- Stretches up arms to be picked up.
- May give clues as to whether hungry or needing a cuddle.
- Loves to be talked to and played with.
- Copies gestures such as coughing, waving.
- Cannot understand 'No' or 'Danger'.

Out of step?

- Does not show pleasure when he sees people he knows well.
- Is not making eye contact.
- Cannot be comforted by parent or close carer.

Doing

- Points with the index finger.
- Drops and throws things on purpose.
- Passes objects easily from one hand to the other.
- Moves around by crawling or 'bottom shuffling' by 10 months.
- Pulls up to standing by 11 months.
- Walks with hands held and feet wide apart and facing outward by 10–12 months.

Out of step?

- Is not sitting by 9 months.
- Holds his body stiff and cannot be put in a sitting position.
- Is not starting to move around in any way.
- Is not interested in new objects or reaching for them.

Hearing and learning to talk

- Looks for quiet sounds made out of sight by 9 months.
- Shows pleasure in babbling loudly by 9 months.
- Conversation 'babble' develops further.
- Knows the direction a sound comes from and turns to it immediately by 10–12 months.
- Shakes his head for 'No' and nods his head to signal 'Yes', by 10–12 months.
- Knows and turns to his own name, by 12 months.
- Likes to look at picture books and can say some sounds at certain pictures.
- There may be one or two single words.

Out of step?

- If he does not babble or make other sounds when someone talks to him.

1–2 years

This is a time of rapid change. Your baby is on the move full of energy and curiosity discovering the world. Parenting becomes demanding because you have to think about safety and setting limits as well as caring for your toddler. In this year your toddler is learning to be a separate person from you.

The 1-year-old sees everything and everyone being there for them alone. This self-centredness will continue through this year.

This is a year of firsts—first steps, first words, first tantrums, moving freely, running, climbing and exploring actively.

Relationships and feelings

By 18 months

- Enjoys physical contact (cuddles).
- Shows different feelings and easily moves from happy to sad to angry.
- Is likely to be afraid of strangers.
- Shows a strong attachment to parents or main carer.
- Shows distress when left by a parent—is often clingy when the parent returns.

Out of step?

- Does not show a preference for people she knows well.
- Does not seem to like cuddles.

By 2 years

- Plays near other children, but not yet with other children (unless the other children are older and able to adapt their play to fit the 2-year-old).
- Unable to share or take turns.
- Gets upset by separating.

Out of step?

- Does not show awareness of different people.
- Doesn't seem interested in surroundings or in people.

Doing

By 12 months can usually:

- Pull self up on a lounge chair.
- Side step around the chair whilst holding on.
- Push a small trolley along in a straight line—but can't turn corners.

By 18 months can usually:

- Walk, at first with feet wide apart, but as her balance improves so her feet get closer and straighter.
- Fall over if she tries to run.
- Push a wheeled toy such as a trolley.
- Place one object such as a block deliberately on to another.
- Start to scribble with a pencil.
- Pick up small objects.

Out of step?

- Not yet walking.
- Cannot hold a spoon and get food to her mouth.
- Cannot pick up small objects.

1–2 years *continued*

By 2 years a toddler can usually

- Start to explore more widely, opening doors and drawers and pushing buttons.
- Run fast without falling over when turning corners or stopping.
- Squat steadily to pick up objects from the floor.
- Bring a small chair to the table and sit on the chair at the table.
- Walk backwards pulling a toy or trolley.
- Get up without using her hands.

Out of step?

- Not walking steadily by 2 years, especially if there is a limp.

Learning to talk

By 18 months a toddler can usually

- Babble loudly to self and others, as though having a conversation.
- Listen to things said and understand some things such as 'No' or 'Stop'
- Follow a few simple instructions such as 'Get your shoes'
- Identify a few familiar objects when they are named such as 'Show me the ball' or 'Where is the spoon?'
- Knows and uses six or more words (the words may be quite unclear, but the parent or carer can tell what is meant by the sound).

Out of step?

- Not babbling much.
- Not starting to use some meaningful words.
- Not listening when others speak to him.

By 2 years a toddler can usually

- Use 20 to 50 recognisable words.
- Listen to things that are said to him.
- Start to put two words together such as 'Daddy's car'.
- Can remember two things at a time, for example, 'Get the ball and bring it to daddy'.
- Babble while playing, with a few recognisable words in the babble.
- Tells you most of what he wants with words, for example, 'outside', 'milk', 'want more' or 'go away'.

Out of step?

- Is still mostly silent while playing.
- Does not respond when others talk to him.
- Is not able to point to objects when they are named.
- Uses signs, grunts or gestures but not words when he wants something.

2–3 years

This is a time of challenge—when toddlers really want to find out about themselves and what they want and don't want. Their determination, tantrums and struggle for independence are all part of normal development.

They have new skills and behaviours to learn and remember, feelings to grapple with, and these can be overwhelming.

They can wait a little while... but not for long. They can hold strong feelings inside a little, but these can burst out in a rush. Losing control of such feelings can be frightening—they need lots of physical contact and reassurance that they are lovable.

Relationships and feelings

By 2½ years can usually

- Try hard to be independent, say 'No' a lot, or 'Me do' (but still very dependent on parents).
- Not be able to control his feelings—tantrums are common especially when tired or frustrated.
- Not be able share with others or take turns.
- Resist attempts to stop them doing things.
- Start to play imaginative games, such as putting a doll to bed, driving a car around on the floor or 'feeding' toys.

Out of step?

- Is having tantrums very often.
- Does not play with adults or older children.

By 3 years, children can usually

- Try to copy adults, and may be able to be helpful, for example, help put toys away.
- Play games using lots of imagination and start to join in with other children's play.

Out of step?

- Not playing imaginative games or becoming obsessed with particular objects or not using toys the way they are 'meant' to be used, for example, pushing a car along a road rather than just playing with the wheels.
- Mostly 'in his own world' rather than interacting with others.

Doing

By 2½ years can usually

- Climb on and off furniture.
- Run smoothly and climb on play equipment.
- Kick a large ball gently but not necessarily where she wants it to go.
- Throw a ball more or less where she wants it to go.
- Climb up stairs.
- Feed herself with a spoon and drink from an open cup.
- Help to dress and undress.
- Be very active and resists attempts to stop her doing things. Does not understand about danger, even if she can say that something is dangerous.

2–3 years *continued*

Out of step?

- Cannot run smoothly, especially if there is a limp.
- Cannot climb stairs or on to low furniture.
- Is far more active or less active than other children of the same age.
- Is not yet managing to feed herself most of the time.

By 3 years can usually

- Push or pull large toys around to where she wants them.
- Walk alone up and down stairs.
- Push the pedals on a pedal toy, for example, tricycle.
- Stand and walk on tiptoe.
- Kick a ball forcefully.
- Throw a ball and catch one with outstretched arms.
- Undress and put on some simple clothes.
- Eat with spoon and fork.
- Manage toilet training (some children will not manage this until they are nearly 4 years old).

Out of step?

- Not able to run as smoothly as other children of the same age.
- Not climbing skilfully.

Learning to talk

By 2½ years can usually

- Understand a lot more than he can talk about.
- Use well over 100 recognisable words, but many of the words will be unclear, as he cannot say all of the sounds in the words.
- Put the words into short sentence, for example, 'Look Mummy, dog'.
- Talk during play.
- Let people know what he wants using words rather than signs.
- Realise that language can get others to respond.

Out of step?

- Is not using words to let others know what he wants.
- Is generally not talking clearly enough for parent or carer to know what he means.
- Seems to be in a 'world of his own' and doesn't respond when others speak to him.

By 3 years can usually

- Talk clearly enough so that strangers are able to understand at least some of what he is saying.
- Use words such as 'Me' and 'You' correctly.
- Ask many questions starting with 'What', 'Where' and 'Why'.
- Listen to stories, asking repeatedly for favourite stories.
- Make up long stories while playing.

Out of step?

- Is not using words to let others know what he wants.
- Is not talking clearly enough for parents or carer to know what he wants.
- Seems to be in a 'world of his own' and doesn't respond when others speak to him.

3–4 years

This is a time of moving from babyhood to childhood. Children tend to be more relaxed and cooperative... and have less need for everything 'right now'. With a growing vocabulary they are able to express their ideas. They have rich imagination and may have strong fears. They love to play and enjoy doing physical things.

This is a time of learning how to get along with others and understanding sharing and taking turns. They are learning about being a leader and being a follower. They are now more comfortable spending some of their time away from parents or carers.

Relationships and feelings

Can usually:

- Play cooperatively with other children some of the time.
- Learn to share and take turns, but still cannot manage competitive games.
- Be apart from her parent more easily in places she knows well.
- Become more independent and does not want help from parents.
- Show caring for other children who are distressed.
- Be involved in complicated make-believe play.
- Find it difficult to sort out what is 'pretend' and what is 'real'.

Out of step?

- Does not yet interact with other children or with adults through play.
- Is excessively aggressive with or withdrawn from other children.
- Repeats the same simple play activity over and over again for long periods.

Doing

During this year can usually begin to:

- Climb ladders.
- Walk along a plank.
- Stand, walk and run on tiptoes.
- Use pedals on a tricycle and turn safely.
- Stand on one foot for several seconds.
- Learn to cut with scissors.
- Roll or bounce a ball, but catching is more difficult.
- Eat well with a spoon and fork.
- Manage toileting, but may still have 'accidents' when stressed, tired or if she 'forgets' to go to the toilet (may have been too busy or preoccupied). Many will still wet the bed.
- Enjoy helping adults around the house.
- Sort and match.
- Play pretend games, for example, doctors and nurses, super heroes and imaginary friends.
- Explore and collect things.

Out of step?

- Not doing the above activities as well as other children of the same age.
- Cannot jump with two feet together.
- Not able to be toilet trained and not usually dry during the day by 4 years old.
- 'Wetting' again after becoming dry during the day.

Reminders

Learning to talk

During this year can usually

- Know more than 1200 words.
- Talk in complex sentences that are mostly grammatically correct.
- Speak in ways that most people can understand (although there are often sounds which he cannot yet manage such as s, r, z, th, v, f).
- Enjoy stories.
- Enjoy jokes.
- Ask lots of questions to find out about the world around him, especially 'Why?'.
- Can tell you how old he is.
- Can talk about what happened yesterday and about tomorrow.

Out of step?

- Still speaks unclearly (you can't understand what he says most of the time) or is not talking in sentences of three or more words.
- Is unable to follow simple instructions.
- Is not talking during play.
- Doesn't seem to understand what parents or carer say to him.

- The way you care for your child will have an effect on what your child does.
- The relationship with your child is precious and needs time and work.
- Babies and children thrive in an environment where there is encouragement, support, love and affection.
- Talk, sing, read, listen and respond from the start.
- Know what is reasonable at each stage of development—this prevents unrealistic expectations and frustration for both parents and child.
- It takes time to learn how to 'tune in' to your baby—don't expect to know what your baby needs straight away.
- Watch for what your child likes to do and provide opportunities to play and explore.
- Babies and toddlers at play always need adult supervision.
- 'Tummy play' on the floor helps baby strengthen back and neck muscles and legs for crawling.
- Babies and children are learning all the time—the job of parents is to help them feel safe and loved in a welcoming place where their needs are met.
- Each child is different and will develop in his own special way.
- If your baby or child seems 'out of step' talk to a child health nurse, doctor or other health professional—a second opinion can reassure you or find the help that is needed.

Contacts

Breastfeeding National Helpline	24-hour	1800 686 2 686
Child and Family Centres (parenting information and support)	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Gungahlin	6207 0120
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: Tuggeranong	6207 8228
	9am–5pm Monday–Friday: West Belconnen	6205 2904
Maternal and Child Health	8am–5pm Monday–Friday	6207 9977
KidSafe ACT (child safety information)	8am–3pm Monday–Friday	6290 2244
Parentline ACT	9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public hols	6287 3833
Poisons Information Centre	24-hour	131 126

Websites

www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.parentlink.act.gov.au	Other parenting guides, including Discipline, Learning to talk, Tantrums, Toilet training
www.raisingchildren.net.au	Raising Children Network—covering topics for parenting newborns to teens
www.zerotothree.com	Information on healthy development of babies and young children

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