

HUMAN GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

What is child development

Child Development is a process every child goes through. This process involves learning and mastering skills like sitting, walking, talking, skipping, and tying shoes. Children learn these skills called developmental milestones during predictable time periods.

A child's growth and development can be divided into five periods:

- Infancy: 0-1
- Toddler: 1-3
- Preschool years: 3-5
- Middle childhood years: 6-10
- Adolescence: 11-adulthood

Children develop skills in five main areas:

- Cognitive: This is the ability to learn and solve problems.
- Social and Emotional Development: This is the child's ability to interact with others, including helping themselves and self-control.
- Speech and Language Development: This is the child ability to understand and use language.
- Fine Motor Development: This is the child's ability to use small muscles like their hands and fingers to pick up objects.
- Gross Motor Skills or large muscle: This is the child's ability to use large muscles, like sitting up and walking.

Developmental Milestones and Delays:

Child development refers to the process in which children go through skill development during predictable time periods called developmental milestones. Developmental delays occur when children have not reached these milestones in the expected time period. For Example; The normal range for learning to walk is between 9 and 15 months and a 20-month-old child has not begun walking, this would be a developmental delay.

Factors That Influence Developmental Milestones:

- Genes: Some people refer to this as "nature". This is a blueprint for what characteristics a child may have, like blue eyes.
- Environment: This includes experiences children have in their home, school and community environments. The environment can either improve or harm a child's genetic blueprint.

If a child has developmental delays, it is important to get early intervention.

- Children need to learn developmental skills in a consecutive order. *Example: a child needs to sit up on his own before he can be able to stand up.*
- Early intervention helps a child advance in all areas of development. *Ex; if a child has a delay in speech it can affect social and emotional development*
- Early intervention is important for a child to develop good self-esteem.

Brain Development and Behavior

The brain grows at an amazing rate during development. At times during development 250,000 neurons are added every minute! At birth, almost all the neurons that the brain will ever have are present. The brain continues to grow for a few years after birth. By the age of 2 the brain is 80% of adult size, yet it is not fully mature until the mid-twenties.

There are 3 parts to growth and development of the brain:

- Physical
- Mental
- Cognitive

Physical and mental maturity is obvious and can be measured. Physical by height and weight, mental by memory and technical work. Both of these are usually complete by the end of the teen years.

Cognitive maturity consists of:

- Mature judgment
- Seeing into the future
- Seeing cause and effect
- Moral intellect
- Abstract thinking
- Seeing what is not obvious
- Planning and decision-making
- Rules of social conduct

The brain is not fully developed in these above areas until the mid-twenties. Adolescent's ability to make totally mature judgment calls, seeing how current behavior affects future outcomes is limited. They do not have the brain cell connections to do judgment calls. For this reason, it is important for adolescents to have adult guidance and input into their lives.

The parts of the brain involved with teens emotional responses are fully functioning, and even more active than an adult. Hence, we often see highly emotional teenagers. The part of the brain involved in keeping emotional and impulsive responses in check are still reaching maturity.

There is still ongoing research into the teen brain. It is not yet possible to know what behavior or ability is the result of immature brain or the result of other factors as genetic traits, personal history, family, friends or culture. With this new information about brain development, it is important for parents, mentors and all of society to help our children develop wisdom, avoid dangerous risky behaviors, and support them until the brain reaches full development.