

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

A child's early years are critical for later health and development.¹ Missing key milestones during this crucial period may indicate developmental delays. Early detection and intervention can help kids stay on track, so it is critical to know what to expect during the early stages of a child's development. Between birth and age 5, a child's brain develops more than any other time in life.



90% of brain growth happens by kindergarten.²

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Every child develops at their own pace, but child development experts have a well-established understanding of typical developmental milestones from birth to age 5, as well as indicators that may suggest a developmental delay.³

THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE



Skills Babies Typically Develop

0 to 3 months:

- Holds head up when on stomach
- Begins to smile
- Learns to briefly calm self (e.g., brings hand to mouth and suck on hand)

3 to 6 months:

- Copies movements and sounds
- Begins to babble
- Rolls from stomach to back

6 to 9 months:

- Begins to sit with support
- Plays peek-a-boo
- Knows familiar faces

9 months to 1 year:

- Crawls and pulls to stand
- Uses simple gestures (e.g., shakes head, waves)
- Responds to simple spoken requests

Signs that *Could* Suggest a Developmental Delay

- Doesn't focus and follow a nearby object side to side
- Doesn't notice hands by two months
- Crosses eyes most of the time (occasional crossing of the eyes is normal)
- Doesn't bring objects to mouth by 4 months
- Doesn't push down with legs when feet are placed on a firm surface
- Cannot support head well at 3 months
- Reaches with one hand only
- Does not turn head to locate sounds
- Doesn't roll over in either direction
- Does not crawl
- Cannot stand when supported
- Says no single words ("mama" or "dada")

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THE SECOND YEAR OF LIFE



Skills Babies Typically Develop

1 to 2 years:

- Walks alone
- Stands on tiptoe
- Uses pincer grasp
- Uses simple phrases
- Uses two- to four-word sentences
- Points to object or picture when it's named for him
- Finds hidden objects easily

Signs that *Could* Suggest a Developmental Delay

- Drags one side of body while crawling
- Does not search for objects that are hidden while he watches
- Does not learn to use gestures, such as waving or shaking head
- Does not point to objects or pictures

THE THIRD YEAR OF LIFE



Skills Babies Typically Develop

2 to 3 years:

- Calms down within 10 minutes after caregiver leaves (like at childcare drop off)
- Engages in conversation
- Says first name, when asked
- Begins to run
- Follows instructions with 2-3 steps

Signs that *Could* Suggest a Developmental Delay

- Cannot grasp a crayon between thumb and finger
- Ignores other children
- Doesn't engage in fantasy play
- Does not use two-word sentences by age 2

THE FOURTH YEAR OF LIFE



Skills Babies Typically Develop

3 to 4 years:

- Hops and stands on one foot up to five seconds
- Kicks ball forward
- Copies square shapes
- Uses scissors
- Tells stories
- Correctly names some colors

Signs that *Could* Suggest a Developmental Delay

- Cannot throw a ball overhand
- Doesn't use sentences of more than three words
- Cannot copy a circle
- Resists dressing, sleeping, using the toilet

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REFERENCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- 1 First Things First. "Brain Development." Retrieved June 3, 2025 from <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/brain-development/#:~:text=90%25%20of%20Brain%20Growth%20Happens,the%20foundation%20for%20their%20future>.
- 2 Gerber, A. J., Peterson, B. S., Giedd, J. N., Lalonde, F. M., Celano, M. J., White, S. L., Wallace, G. L., Lee, N. R., & Lenroot, R. K. "Anatomical Brain Magnetic Resonance Imaging of Typically Developing Children and Adolescents. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 48(5), 465–470. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CHI.0b013e31819f2715>.
- 3 Child Mind Institute. "Complete Guide to Developmental Milestones." Retrieved June 3, 2025 from <https://childmind.org/guide/parents-guide-to-developmental-milestones/>.