



Social work and child development in the early and middle years (ages 0 to 11)

Child Development Chart

This chart draws on a number of child development theories to provide a summary of the ages at which key developmental milestones and stages typically occur between ages 0 and 11.

1. Biophysical development (Fahlberg, 1994; Sheridan, 1997)
2. Cognitive theory (Piaget, 2001)
3. Socio-emotional (Erikson, 1995)
4. Behavioural moral development (Kohlberg, 1981)


The chart is intended for use alongside:


- > An accompanying briefing **Social work and child development in the early and middle years (ages 0 to 11)** (Research in Practice, 2024).
- > The **Early Years Child Development Tool** (Nottinghamshire County Council, 2021) for children aged 0 to 5 years. The tool includes details of developmental ‘milestones’ across four related domains – cognitive and language development; socioemotional development; physical development; and self-care – to support assessment, tracking and recording of a child’s development.


Together these resources will help you to identify when there may be grounds for concern and further investigation about a child’s development. It is important to remember that age-related milestones vary greatly between individual children (O’Brien & Langmack, 2016) and can be influenced by a wide range of factors, as the accompanying briefing makes clear (Research in Practice, 2024). Also, bear in mind that the key theoretical frameworks for understanding child development are heavily influenced by 20th-century theorists. Those theorists did not always acknowledge the extent to which different child and family backgrounds, culture and contexts can shape the way individual children grow and develop. Such factors need to be taken into account when considering an individual child’s developmental milestones.


Please note: all references for the chart are contained in *Social work and child development in the early and middle years (ages 0 to 11)* (Research in Practice, 2024).

Key developmental milestones

Theory/stage	0-6 months	6 months-1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5-11 years
Biophysical development (Fahlberg, 1994; Sheridan, 1997) 	Prenatal and preterm foetal development by 8 weeks. Lifts head. Rolls front to back. Visually alert. Attentive to known voices. Watches movement of own hands. Attachment to primary caregiver.	Sits and crawls. Pulls to stand. May walk. Waves 'bye-bye'. Stranger awareness and anxiety	Runs. Kicks a ball. Circular scribbles. Builds six bricks. Spoon feeds. Symbolic play. Drinks from cup. Undresses. Development of sense of self.	Jumps. Draws circle. Makes a bridge with three cubes. Says first name, colours, three-word sentences and names. Dresses self. Plays interactively with friend(s). Begins to separate from primary caregiver as now mobile Explores surroundings.	Draws crosses. Stands on one leg. Hops. Says surname. Can do all buttons. Sees themselves and family as centre of the universe. Recognises differences between 'good' and 'bad'.	Draws triangles and more complex shapes. Rides a bike. Good speech. Ties shoelaces. Sense of time. Talks fluently and with confidence. Develops a sense of justice. Develops a sense of humour. Able to put feelings into words.

Theory/stage	Sensorimotor stage (0-2 years)	Pre-operational stage (3-7 years)	Concrete operational stage (7-11 years)
<p data-bbox="107 268 336 351">Cognitive theory (Piaget, 2001)</p> 	<p data-bbox="510 268 1025 331">Lives in the present and learns through senses and actions.</p> <p data-bbox="510 411 1025 539">Learns motor skills: crawling and walking (gross motor), grasping and manipulating small objects (fine motor).</p> <p data-bbox="510 611 1025 707">Develops cognitive abilities, including self-recognition, deferred imitation, and representational play.</p> <p data-bbox="510 778 1025 906">Develops an understanding that if an object is hidden they know that it still exists (e.g. if primary caregiver leaves the room, they will come back).</p>	<p data-bbox="1048 268 1536 363">Remains egocentric – cannot understand that other people think in different ways to them.</p> <p data-bbox="1048 435 1536 499">Develops language and abstract thought.</p> <p data-bbox="1048 571 1536 643">Can think about concepts and ideas that are not physical.</p> <p data-bbox="1048 715 1536 810">Begins symbolic play ('playing pretend'), assigning characteristics or symbols to objects.</p> <p data-bbox="1048 882 1536 978">Drawings start as scribbles and progresses to representations of objects and people.</p> <p data-bbox="1048 1050 1536 1121">Uses words to describe past events, people or items.</p> <p data-bbox="1048 1193 1536 1289">Can mimic other people's actions even if they are not physically present.</p>	<p data-bbox="1559 268 2101 308">Become less egocentric.</p> <p data-bbox="1559 371 2101 467">Starts thinking logically about concrete events but struggles with abstract concepts.</p> <p data-bbox="1559 539 2101 667">Begins to understand the concept of conservation – i.e. although things may change in appearance, their properties remain the same.</p> <p data-bbox="1559 738 2101 810">Awareness of how other people may think and feel.</p> <p data-bbox="1559 882 2101 954">Can classify objects into groups and subgroups.</p>

Theory/stage	Trust vs mistrust (0-18 months)	Autonomy vs shame and doubt (2-3 years)	Initiative vs guilt (3-5 years)	Industry vs inferiority (6-11 years)
<p>Psychosocial development (Erikson, 1995)</p> 	<p>Most fundamental stage in life due to total dependency on caregivers.</p> <p>Feelings form about the world and its safety based on consistency and continuity of carers, care-giving and environmental familiarity.</p> <p>Positive experiences lead to a belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > people are reliable and loving > the world is a good place with trust and security. <p>Unreliable or inadequate care leads to mistrust and fear of the world being unpredictable and inconsistent.</p>	<p>Increasing self-awareness and desire to make simple decisions about preferences.</p> <p>Tantrums and defiance may become apparent.</p> <p>Environment needs to be safe and free from shame as new skills are mastered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Success leads to autonomy. > Failure results in feelings of shame and doubt. 	<p>Conscience and imagination develop.</p> <p>Develop some responsibility for own actions.</p> <p>Assertion of power and control over the world through directing play and other social interactions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Success leads to increased capability and ability to lead others. > Failure leads to sense of guilt, self-doubt and lack of initiative. 	<p>Wants to learn, sticks to tasks and learns from others.</p> <p>Increasing sense of pride in accomplishments.</p> <p>Learns to cope with new social and academic demands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Success leads to a sense of competence. > Failure results in feelings of inferiority and doubt about the future. <p>Negative feelings associated with 'failure' or 'defeat' can be exacerbated by intersectional issues (e.g. ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, etc.).</p>

Model	Pre-conventional (Stages 1 and 2) (up to 9 years)	Conventional (Stages 3 and 4) (10- teens)
<p>Behavioural moral development (Kohlberg, 1981)</p> 	<p>Following rules because they don't want to get in trouble or because they want to get a reward.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>No personal sense of right or wrong.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Stage 1: Avoiding punishment</p> <p>Moral decisions are shaped by observing adults and the consequences of following or breaking their rules.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Stage 2: Self interest</p> <p>Actions are seen in terms of rewards rather than moral value.</p>	<p>Acceptance of social rules concerning right and wrong.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Authority is internalised but isn't questioned. Reasoning is based on the norms of the group to which the child belongs.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Stage 3: Good interpersonal relationships</p> <p>Seeking approval of others</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Stage 4: Societal morality</p> <p>Becomes aware of wider rules of society.</p>

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