

Development in children (0-3 years)

Child development

Your child doesn't just grow bigger as he develops. He also learns social, emotional, behaviour, thinking and communication skills.

Why is understanding your child's development important?

Your child's brain develops fast in these early years. His early experiences – the things he sees, hears, touches, smells and tastes – stimulate his brain, creating millions of connections. These experiences lay the foundation for his learning, health and behaviour.

Tips on what to expect

Development is different for every child – children grow and develop at different rates. The following milestones are meant as a guide only. If you have any concerns, do see your doctor.

The first year

Your newborn might be able to follow your face with his eyes. By the time he turns one, he is likely to have learned to roll, sit up, pull himself up and even to walk. His small hand movements will probably have developed from clutching and grabbing things, to being able to use his thumb and pointer together.

By 5-6 months, your baby has made important attachments to his parents and other close family members or carers, and he loves to play with them. He might seem more aware or afraid of grown-ups he does not know well, but stranger anxiety generally declines after the first year.

Babies typically begin by cooing at about 7-8 weeks then move onto babbling and sounds like 'baba' and 'gaga'. Many children start to form words by around 12 months.

The second year

At this age your child might be spending a lot of time working out what different things do, and what he can do with any object within his reach.

In your child's second year, he will typically go from pulling himself up to standing, walking and running, and developing hand movements like scribbling, turning pages in a book and using a spoon.

Your child is probably becoming more independent. He is able to understand and follow very simple instructions, and moving towards everyday skills for eating, drinking and dressing. You might see him playing side by side with other children, but not often playing with them.

Separation anxiety reaches its peak around 14-18 months, so your child might follow you everywhere and become distressed when you are out of his sight. It usually goes away gradually throughout early childhood.

You might also notice that your toddler finds it hard to deal with 'big' emotions, and so you might see some tantrums.

The third year

At this age, your toddler is probably running and might fall less. He is starting to walk up and down stairs on his own using the rail for balance. He is now better at throwing overarm, kicking and catching a ball, and might even stand on one foot for a few seconds.

Your child is developing emotional skills through pretend play – for example, by feeding a doll or pretending to use a phone. You will see him solving problems by trying things out.

This is a good time to look out for signs that he is ready for toilet training.

Tips to help your child's development

Here are some simple things you can do to help your child's development:

- Build a strong, loving, nurturing relationship with your child. More than anything else, your relationship shapes the way he learns and develops. You can develop your relationship by spending quality time with your child, giving him your full attention, noticing what he is interested in and following his interests.
- Give your child lots of opportunities for play. Play lets your child explore, observe, experiment, solve problems and learn from his mistakes. For example, if his block tower falls down because it was too tall, he will learn to build it differently next time.
- Talk together lots and listen lots – it's the simple secret to helping your child learn language.
- Read to your child. You can read to your child from birth. Reading helps him develop language and the early literacy skills he needs to prepare him for school.
- Provide your child with a healthy balanced diet to ensure he has all the nutrients he needs to grow and develop.
- Give your child lots of opportunities for physical activity. This develops his motor skills, helps him think and lets him explore his world.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

For some suggestions on rhymes, click [here](#) to download a booklet on rhymes!

Recommended Reads

- [The holistic care and development of children from birth to three: an essential guide for students and practitioners](#)
- [Touchpoints birth to 3: your child's emotional and behavioural development](#)
- [The first three years: from infant to toddler—laying the foundation for raising a capable, confident child](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [If You're Happy and You Know It](#)