

Growing up Healthy and Happy

Birth to 18 months

Child development involves learning and mastering certain activities or tasks, referred to as “developmental milestones.” Parents can help support their child’s development by engaging in activities that complement each stage. Children’s abilities to master these tasks should improve as they get older.



Baby's Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Explore world
- Develop a social smile in response to others
- Learn to turn over, sit, crawl, climb, stand and walk
- Say first words

Intellectual

- Experience themselves as one with caregiver (they don’t yet know they’re separate from parents)
- Start to learn people, places and things
- Become aware of routines

Emotional

- Feel loved and worthy of being cared for
- Experience basic-feeling states
- Develop a sense of “self”
- Believe their needs are important

Social

- Bond with caregivers
- Develop trust in caregivers and safety in their environment
- Develop a positive attachment relationship

Parents' Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Create a safe space for your child to explore
- Provide gentle touch to foster connection

Intellectual

- Give positive, warm verbal and non-verbal attention even though child may not understand it yet
- Name child, people and things to help child learn about his/her surroundings
- Narrate your infant’s life and routines
- Establish schedules/routines to give sense of predictability and security

Emotional

- Give calm, continuous care; respond, hold and cuddle when child cries to build trust
- Find ways to manage your frustrations when faced with challenges (e.g., tantrums, sleep deprivation, difficulty feeding, etc.)

Social

- Gain confidence as you learn to understand child’s cries, needs and wants
- Overcome your own fear of separating from your child

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Toddlers: 18 months to 3 years old

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Toddler's Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Explore what they can do in their world, and to their world
- Use their entire bodies to explore
- Learn to walk on their own, drink from a cup, point to body parts and use the toilet
- Very active

Intellectual

- Learn up to 15 words
- Talk, joke and sing
- Imitate; practice social roles
- Start to say things are “mine” to define self

Emotional

- Start to identify feelings and express them in appropriate ways
- Move back and forth between needs for independence and security
- “Terrible 2s” may begin; willful, stubborn, frequent tantrums
- Easily frustrated

Social

- Become more independent
- Separate from parents with “no”
- Understand right and wrong
- Cooperative, imaginative, may have imaginary friends and/or fantasy play

Parents' Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Create a safe space so children can explore more of their environments
- Set limits on unsafe behaviors

Intellectual

- Offer choices
- Tolerate “selfish” behavior so your child can know “owning” and being separate

Emotional

- Accept positive and negative feelings
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Be selective about when to disagree (choose your battles)
- Try not to lose patience when they say “no,” take care of your own emotions
- Focus on the big picture
- Tolerate tantrums (while keeping your child safe)

Social

- Encourage independence with good boundaries (like helping your child sleep in his/her own bed)
- Know that your child’s “no” is a way to practice independence and the beginning of individuation
- Try to say “yes” whenever you can

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Young children: 4 to 5 years old

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Children's Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Continue to explore and learn about their world
- Learn to use their physical power
- Take initiative and try new things
- Learn to hop, somersault, climb, swing and skip
- Dress themselves
- Use the toilet on their own

Intellectual

- Speak in increasingly complicated sentences
- Have lots of questions about the world
- Learn about cause and effect when seeing that there are positive and negative consequences to their actions
- Thinking remains literal

Emotional

- Feel proud when able to “do it myself”
- Feel frustrated at times by what they can’t do
- Self-esteem depends on how others react to them

Social

- Enjoy fantasy and pretend play
- Learn to be well-behaved in different settings
- Learn to take turns and share
- Become more interested in playing with friends

Parents' Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Continue to provide a safe space for your child to explore both inside and outside your house
- Tolerate their desire to “do it myself,” even if they don’t do it perfectly

Intellectual

- Give information and correct misinformation; answer questions (including the “why” questions)
- Use positive and negative consequences to teach cause and effect
- Let them make simple decisions to provide a sense of power and control

Emotional

- Set limits calmly and fairly; be consistent and follow through
- Defiance and refusal to follow rules is typical; a calm, consistent response is best
- Help your child cope with loss and grief (pets, family members)

Social

- Encourage “make believe” play while helping them learn the difference between fantasy and reality
- Encourage peer relationships

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Elementary age children: 6 to 11 years old

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Children's Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Develop mastery of skills
- Take on more responsibilities at home
- Balance “screen time” with outdoor, social and physical activities

Intellectual

- Show more curiosity about the world, how things work and what things mean
- Learn how to problem solve
- Learn to read and write
- Develop special interests
- Develop abstract thinking
- Develop longer attention span

Emotional

- Develop more emotional self-control and ability to tolerate distress
- May become more self-conscious
- May develop more fears and worries about the future, death, peer pressure and other issues

Social

- Learn how their behavior can affect other people
- Learn about rules, responsibility and cooperation
- May have a “best friend” and may also have “enemies”
- Learn social skills (reading social cues, joining in play, hosting others, learning good sportsmanship)
- Spend more time with friends

Parents' Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Encourage new skills and new activities
- Encourage (and sometimes help) finish tasks
- Encourage outdoor activity and exercise; set limits on “screen time”
- Encourage healthy eating

Intellectual

- Encourage curiosity and respond to questions honestly, with age-appropriate information
- Tolerate and encourage challenging questions
- Encourage problem solving (“What could you try differently next time?” or “How can we fix that?”)
- When encouraging new interests or activities, don’t expect perfection

Emotional

- Support efforts to cope with frustration when disappointment occurs
- Allow for the experience of distress when faced with fear or other unpleasant emotions

Social

- Expect some backtalk but calmly set limits on it without anger
- Set expectations and clear rules for behavior
- Assign chores to help build sense of family and responsibility
- Talk together about what you watch on TV or other screens (as a family)

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Tweens: 12 to 14 years old

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Tween's Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Rapid physical growth and body changes
- Increase in risky behaviors, as they start to experiment with their own limits and with “adult behavior”

Intellectual

- Increasingly able to see multiple perspectives
- Greater emphasis on comparing self to others

Emotional

- Adopting a personal value system
- Establishing a sexual identity
- May become more self-conscious and fearful of rejection
- Separating emotionally from parents

Social

- Balance independence with connection to parents
- Developing stable peer relationships
- Social relationships become very important

Parents' Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Give them the information they need to protect their health and safety

Intellectual

- Listen more, talk less
- Expect some mistakes as they work to build their unique identities

Emotional

- Be patient; know that they will reconnect with you in late adolescence/early adulthood when they have a stronger sense of self
- Expect that their hormones will create imbalance
- Try to remain calm with argumentative teens (they are practicing how to negotiate this skill)
- Stay involved, despite teen’s rejection

Social

- Continue to provide support, set limits and assist with decision making
- Monitor their friendships in an open way

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Teens: 15 to 18 years old

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Teen's Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Adjust to sexually maturing body (and emotions)
- Obtain sufficient sleep to make up for the increased sleep needs of adolescence

Intellectual

- Develop their personal sense of identity
- Develop mature set of values and ethical principles
- Become more observant and reflective
- Develop better abstract-thinking skills (including planning ahead)

Emotional

- Achieve emotional independence from parents
- Changing relationship with caregivers
- Explore their values, beliefs and theories

Social

- Form healthy, long-term intimate relationships
- Manage maturing roles and responsibilities
- Transition to work, college and/or independent living

Parents' Tasks and Transitions

Physical

- Continue to set firm limits about safety and values
- Celebrate their maturing and growing independence

Intellectual

- Talk to them about choices and consequences
- Provide guidance while resisting the temptation to control

Emotional

- Encourage them to gradually make their own decisions
- Be selective about when to disagree
- Work to balance out giving them too much freedom vs. clinging too tightly
- Respect your teen’s difference in opinion (even when their choices, tastes, styles and dress may seem bizarre to you)

Social

- Be a good role model
- Encourage healthy peer involvement