

## The Natural Process of Early Childhood Development

The accompanying developmental checklists show skills for children eighteen months through five years of age. The skills are arranged in groupings of several months at a time and are meant to be used as a guide rather than as a rigid timetable. This information will help you to anticipate stages of normal child development in the areas of fine motor, gross motor, language, cognitive, self-help, and social skills. Each child will acquire these skills at his or her own pace. Some children develop them more quickly in one area and more slowly in another.

The toddler stage (eighteen months to three years old) is an exciting period of growth for children. They explore their environment using all five senses. They are the center of their universe, and the world revolves around them.

As children enter the “terrible twos,” the experience does not have to become one of uncontrollable terror and mayhem. At this time, children are beginning to explore how much they can control their universe and what the limits are. The words “no” and “yes” become powerful ones, allowing them to take ownership of their own boundaries. With gentle guidance from parents and care providers, children can form limits of control that are compatible with the needs of others as well as their own.

Learning for a toddler often occurs when an activity can be repeated over and over. For example, a toddler loves to dump things, put them back, and then do it again repeatedly. This simple activity is a challenge, and the child is striving to master it. There is delight in every accomplishment.

The preschooler (three, four, and five year olds) is becoming more autonomous. As he or she improves fine and gross motor skills, the child is able to meet many needs with little help from an adult. Dressing, undressing, using the bathroom, and eating are some activities a preschooler can now do independent from an adult.

Preschoolers spend most of their time playing. Play is very important to their development. Play offers an excellent opportunity for language development. They enjoy playing in groups of peers, participating in dramatic play, and having a chance to stretch their imaginations.

Of course these are only guidelines. Every child has an individual pace and should not be compared to other children in general. Comparisons only become useful when a child's abilities are extremely disparate from others of his, or her age. Further investigation into the cause of such variances may be worthwhile. Be aware of differences but do not jump to any conclusions. Most likely any variance is perfectly normal.