

Introduction

Toddlers love to explore the world around them as they learn through new experiences. Your toddler is developing in many different ways. Developmental milestones are markers in time for what is normal for a child to develop new skills. Most of their milestones will fit into four different areas of development. These are: Cognitive, Language and Communication, Social and Emotional, and Physical, specifically gross and fine motor skills. These groupings are really about the development of your child's brain and thought processes (cognitive development), their ability to speak and understand speech (language and communication development), the way they are able to interact with others and express their feelings (social and emotional development), and their growing ability to control their body movements (physical development).

Cognitive Development

As I have mentioned, cognitive development is the growth of your child's mind and the development of their ability to think. Even in their first year of life, you will begin to see many exciting new skills and actions that they are mastering. Every experience they have will teach them new and important things about the world. Along with this development, some of their personality will begin to emerge. Part of cognitive development is also your child's attention span. Learning what is appropriate to expect from your child at this age can save tremendous frustration for both of you.

Language and Communication Development

As your baby starts to become a toddler, they will develop the ability to speak and understand speech. This is a very fun time, as you will be able to start understanding more of what they are communicating with their words and gestures. As your toddler learns more and more new words, you will have a lot of fun hearing them begin to take on the world. Your child will delight you with their own unique phrases and meanings of words—so enjoy this time as their language develops.

Physical Development

The development of your toddler's ability to move around is divided into two different groups: big body movements and fine motor skills. Big body movements are those that combine the large muscles of different parts of the body in order to move around. Fine motor skills are those movements involving a child's fingers that are small, but important—like picking up small objects or putting two objects together.

Social and Emotional Development

Between 12 and 15 months of age, your child will begin to express a wide variety of emotions, ranging from happy to sad. They may cling to you when you leave them with a babysitter or become shy around strangers. Remember, they are exploring, discovering, and learning, but they can also still help to tidy up when playtime is over. Just be realistic about a toddler's attention span, which is about at the level of just putting away a few blocks—they certainly won't be dusting an entire house anytime soon!

Developmental Milestone Summary

We have covered quite a few milestones that your toddler will be achieving around 12 to 15 months of age. Let's go through them again to help you remember what they are. A toddler at this age typically can:

Cognitive Milestones

- Look at the person who is saying their name
- Imitate your actions and gestures, such as waving “bye-bye”
- Engage in pretend or symbolic play
- Understand and follow one-step directions like “lie down” and “gentle touch”
- Point to body parts when asked
- Make a tower of two to three blocks
- Make a line with a crayon
- Finger-feed themselves
- Help with getting dressed by extending arm or leg
- Find hidden objects easily
- Begin to use objects correctly

Language Milestones

- Say four to six words, including “dada” and “mama”
- Respond to and say “no”
- Use simple gestures, such as shaking head for “no”
- Use exclamations, such as “uh-oh!”
- Follow simple commands
- Babble with inflection and try to imitate words

When Milestones Are Delayed

Every child is unique and may not be able to do the same thing at the same time as other children. With that said, there are some things to watch for that could signal that you should contact your medical provider. These may not be serious, but they will help you and your pediatrician to identify ways to better help your child.

- Does not search for objects that are hidden while she watches
- Doesn't say any single words
- Does not make any purposeful gestures
- Does not point to objects or pictures

Physical Milestones

Big Body Movements

- Walk alone; crawl; squat
- Crawl up stairs
- Try to climb out of high chair or crib
- Play with and roll a ball

Fine Motor Movements

- Use spoon to feed themselves and hairbrush to brush their own hair
- Turn pages of a book
- Bang two objects together
- Scribble
- Open cabinets and remove contents
- Finger-feed self
- Put object into and take it out of a container

Social and Emotional Milestones

- Recognize names and point to people
- Cooperate and may even help with dressing themselves
- Enjoy imitating people in their play
- Test parental responses to their behavior
- Express emotions ranging from happy to sad
- Ask for help by pointing and using some sounds
- Appear shy or anxious with strangers
- Cry when mom or dad leaves

Resources:

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