



Let's Talk Normal Development

So often, we wonder how our children are progressing in their development. Although no two children develop the same way, there are expectations and milestones that typically take place at certain ages. Young infants learn to interact during the first few months as part of establishing a secure relationship with their caregivers. By feeding and talking to a baby, you are teaching social interaction and initiating the development of trust. Infants respond to voices by three months of age and will begin to verbally interact in the next few months. Infants are aware of their environments and the mood around them. They want to share their joys by looking and pointing.

During the first years of life, the ability of the body to move in space changes dramatically, from being able to sit unassisted (6-9 months), to walking independently (12-18 months), to running, jumping, and pedaling a tricycle (2-3 years), and a bicycle without training wheels (7-8 years). Toilet training differs by culture. In the United States, girls are typically able and willing to use the toilet independently by 2-3 years and boys by 4 years.

Hand and fine motor skills allow us to manipulate our environment and give us independence. A one year old can open up the world by opening the pages of a book. We start to write by holding a large crayon at 18-20 months and make a mark on the world. From 2 to 4 years, children are cutting with scissors, stacking blocks, and putting on articles of clothing. A 4 year old can dress and manipulate clothing fasteners. Let your child feed by themselves to understand texture and practice their abilities. A four year old will butter bread or make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Communicating starts early, with smiling, babbling, and sharing. Saying words that are understandable to others becomes evident at 12 months of age. By 2 years, children are putting words together to share their thoughts. Seventy-five percent of what is spoken by a 3 year old should be understood by all. Four year olds talk in paragraphs. The development of language is the best predictor of how well a child may perform academically.

Establishing trusting relationships with caregivers and acquiring behaviors to maintain well-being are an important part of emotional development in the first years of life. By three months, infants seek interaction with their parents by mimicking them vocally and with facial expressions. Around six months, infants become more interested in the world around them and seek to explore it. Despite this interest, 8 to 9 month old infants prefer their parents to strangers and become upset when new people approach them. This is commonly known as stranger anxiety. Around this same time, infants are able to recognize when their parents are planning to leave and protest with crying or clinging to their parents. These behaviors are known as separation anxiety and are developmentally normal at this age and in toddlerhood up to three years of age. Children continue to develop emotionally throughout toddlerhood by establishing autonomy and discovering their skills which give them a sense of accomplishment.

Milestones give us guidance on ways to help a child develop. Talking, playing, and reading with a child encourages the child to explore in their minds, words, and bodies. If a child is not progressing according to the expected goals, then evaluation by a professional should be considered. Start with your pediatrician. For language concerns, an evaluation by a speech-language pathologist is the best choice. For behavior difficulties that disrupt family dynamics, checking with a child psychologist, developmental pediatrician, or child psychiatrist can give support and guidance.

We, at Square One Specialists in Child and Adolescent Development, believe all questions should be explored and answered. Of paramount importance to us as physicians and therapists is to address concerns of everyone involved in the care of a child. When a child succeeds, the entire family unit is stronger, happier, and better able to plan for the future.