



Building Blocks

Your child's development in the first 3 years



Children's
of Alabama®



Children's of Alabama
Department of Physical Therapy
and Occupational Therapy



The basic building blocks for typical and healthy child development include the development of movement, language, social and emotional, and intellectual skills. Family members and caregivers help babies with these skills as they grow. This booklet will help you to know what to expect as your baby develops and to be aware of “red flags” or potential problems to help you and your pediatrician monitor your child’s development and seek early therapy or intervention services if there is a need.

Children’s PT & OT Department can provide information and services related to concerns with movement and activities of daily living (eating, feeding and swallowing, dressing, bathing, playing, writing). 205-638-9645

Children’s Hearing & Speech Department can provide information and services related to concerns with hearing, speech, language, feeding, swallowing and cognitive concerns. 205-638-9149

Children’s Early Intervention Services can provide information and assist with services for children birth to three years with developmental delays or medical conditions that might result in developmental delays. 205-638-6820

This booklet describes typical development, activities, and appropriate toys that will enhance development. Red flags, things to be concerned about, are listed at each age. For premature babies, remember to use their adjusted age when referencing this booklet (ex. If born three months early, subtract three months from age to compare development.) Premature babies are at greater risk for delays with talking, walking, feeding, learning, and behavior.

If you identify concerns or red flags, please discuss with your child's provider. Your child may be eligible and benefit from Early Intervention that can provide therapy services in the home from birth to three years of age. Earlier intervention can have a positive impact on learning new skills and improve overall development.

SAFETY

Keep your baby safe at all times. Safe sleep includes using a firm mattress with a snug fitted sheet and no other added materials. Babies should sleep on their back and should only sleep in their own crib. Follow instructions for equipment like car seats, strollers, etc. Limit time spent in "containers" such as seats, walkers, and swings to 10 minutes, 1-2 times per day. Limit time lying flat on back when awake. Do NOT use rolling walkers or jumpers as these can restrict movement and negatively impact development.

TV - SCREEN TIME

"Screen time" includes time spent watching TV and playing with electronic devices like computers and iPads. You should limit having TV on when children are playing and turn off TV when no one is watching. Screen time is not recommended under the age of 2 years except for video chatting. For children from 2 years to 5 years, screen time should be limited to only one hour per day with co-viewing to help the child understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them. Watch adult programming only when children are NOT present. A baby's brain is not equipped to process the sounds and lights of a TV. Even background television is enough to cause delays in language development and reading skills, short term memory difficulty, attention disorders, sleep problems, behavior challenges, and reduce child/ caregiver bonding.

ROUTINE

Engage the whole family in your child's therapy and learning daily with activities listed in this booklet for each age range. A consistent routine is important for infant's feeding, play time, bathtime, and sleep. You should aim to perform a total of 60 minutes of tummy time or developmental play daily.

RED FLAGS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS AT ANY AGE:

- ◆ Unusual or excessive behaviors such as head banging or rocking self
- ◆ Hurting others
- ◆ Making unusual finger movements near face
- ◆ Sometimes appears to be deaf
- ◆ Bumping into or tripping over objects or furniture a lot
- ◆ Frequently has difficulty sleeping or eating

1-2 Months

TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Startle reflex
- ☐ Turn head and lift slightly from their tummy
- ☐ Grasping reflex (it's normal to have clenched hands at times)
- ☐ Bring hands to face
- ☐ Looks at faces and high-contrast toys
- ☐ Reacts to sounds

RED FLAGS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS

- ◆ Excessively stiff in arms/ legs
- ◆ No movement in arms and legs
- ◆ No startle response to loud noises
- ◆ Excessively fussy and does not calm when picked up or swaddled
- ◆ Trouble sucking or swallowing during feeding

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE DEVELOPMENT

- Complete tummy time on elevated surface or caregiver's shoulder or chest with toys at eye level in front of them.
- Help baby get their hands to their mouth
- Quiet room to avoid overstimulation and overuse of sound machines
- Use contrast toys (bold opposing colors- typically black and white) and faces/mirrors for visual stimulation
- Learn baby's signals to know what they feel and need. Are they alert and interested in interaction? It is time to play. Are they turning eyes away and getting fussy? It is time for a break. If the baby seems sleepy, place back on back for safe sleep.
- Respond positively to your baby by acting excited, smiling, talking to baby when they make sounds
- Complete baby massage
- Talk, sing, or read books
- Cuddle and hold baby. You cannot spoil a baby by holding or responding to them
- Offer pacifier

APPROPRIATE TOYS

- Mirrors
- Black and white high contrast images
- Mobiles



3 Months

TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Lifts head and pushes up on elbows while lying on stomach
- ☐ Brings hands together and to mouth
- ☐ Opens hands freely
- ☐ Looks at faces and surroundings for several seconds
- ☐ Makes eye contact
- ☐ Moves head and eyes to watch moving objects while on back
- ☐ Looks toward sounds and startles to loud sounds
- ☐ Smiles
- ☐ Makes pleasurable sounds: cooing, chuckling
- ☐ Different cries and making vowel sounds like “ooo” or “aaa”
- ☐ Calms when talked to, held, or picked up

RED FLAGS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS

- ◆ Does not lift head while lying on stomach
- ◆ Requires full support to hold head upright when held at shoulder
- ◆ Keeps head to one side most of the time
- ◆ Back of head or one side of head looks flat
- ◆ Has a hard time turning head in all directions or neck seems stiff
- ◆ Crosses legs most of the time or difficult to separate legs for diaper change
- ◆ Keeps hands tightly fisted
- ◆ Arms and/or legs feel stiff
- ◆ Does not respond to sound
- ◆ Does not look at face

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE DEVELOPMENT

- Place baby on tummy with arms under shoulders to play (when awake)
- Smile at baby
- Talk and sing to baby
- Hold baby
- Rock baby
- Massage baby

APPROPRIATE TOYS

- Mirrors
- Small, easy to grasp rattles
- Mobiles
- Music boxes
- Lullaby sounds

4-6 Months

TYPICAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Rolls back to tummy and tummy to back
- ☐ Pushes up on arms while propping on tummy
- ☐ Sits with support and props on hands while sitting
- ☐ Rocks on hands and knees
- ☐ Puts weight on legs when held in standing position
- ☐ Tries to get things out of reach
- ☐ Brings feet to mouth
- ☐ Reaches out for toys and people they recognize
- ☐ Can hold and shake a toy
- ☐ Turns head to locate sounds beyond what able to see
- ☐ Notices toys that move or make sounds
- ☐ Responds to different tones and sounds
- ☐ Looks at self in mirror, copies facial expressions
- ☐ Shows interest and pleasure when spoken to by smiling or laughing
- ☐ Calms by rocking, touching, favorite sounds
- ☐ Responds to affection - snuggles, kisses, smiles

RED FLAGS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS

- ◆ Eyes do not focus well, cross most of the time, or have random eye movements
- ◆ Cannot lift head when in a sitting position
- ◆ Arms and/or legs feel stiff
- ◆ Back or trunk feels weak
- ◆ Does not attempt or has difficulty grasping small objects
- ◆ Eye contact is poor
- ◆ Does not respond to sound
- ◆ Does not laugh or smile
- ◆ Makes little noise

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE DEVELOPMENT

- Prop baby in sitting
- Holding rattle
- Read, sing, or play peek-a-boo or pat-a-cake
- Call baby by name
- Place baby on tummy to play and look at toys, book, or mirror

APPROPRIATE TOYS

- Baby gym with dangling toys
- Teething rings or rattles to hold and shake
- Toys and blankets with different textures
- Mats or quilts on floor
- Toys that make sound or music

7-9 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Sits without support
- ☐ Crawls on hands and knees
- ☐ Grasps small objects
- ☐ Moves things from one hand to another
- ☐ Bangs toys together
- ☐ Brings cup to mouth
- ☐ Imitates gestures
- ☐ Points to make wants known
- ☐ Responds to name when called
- ☐ Makes sounds to get attention
- ☐ Smiles at mirror image

Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Has difficulty holding head up when sitting
- ◆ Legs are stiff/toes are pointed
- ◆ Bears weight poorly on legs
- ◆ Arms/hands are used poorly
- ◆ No response to sound
- ◆ Responds only to loud noises
- ◆ Makes sounds in monotones
- ◆ No speech sounds are heard
- ◆ No vocal interactions

Activities to Enhance Development

- Provide a safe space to pivot and crawl
- Place toys a little out of reach to encourage movement
- Point to pictures
- Roll balls to baby
- Make play sounds and wait for response or take turns
- Sing and talk to baby
- Play simple games like peek-a-boo
- Talk about activities during play
- Read to baby
- Name body parts while playing, bathing, and dressing

Appropriate Toys

- Blocks or simple toys to bang together
- Bathtub toys
- Pop-up toys or jack-in-the-box
- Nested cups
- Bowls and shapes for taking out and putting in



10-12 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Moves in and out of different positions to get toys and explore
- ☐ Pulls up to stand
- ☐ Cruises/walks around furniture
- ☐ Pushes rolling toys or box
- ☐ May take first steps without support
- ☐ Pokes objects using pointer finger, points to things
- ☐ Stacks rings
- ☐ Puts objects into containers
- ☐ Plays peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake
- ☐ Uses jargon that sounds like speech
- ☐ Says 1-2 words (eg., mama, dada, uh oh, bye)
- ☐ Imitates sounds: animals, cars, trains
- ☐ Imitates gestures: waving, head shake or nod
- ☐ Looks at or points to familiar objects or pictures when named
- ☐ Follows a few simple commands
- ☐ Has regular sleep schedule
- ☐ Feeds self finger foods
- ☐ Drinks from a cup (needs help with an open cup but can manage a sippy cup)
- ☐ Cooperates with dressing



Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Uses 1 side of the body to move most of the time
- ◆ Seems too stiff or too weak
- ◆ Unable to get into sitting and pull up to stand
- ◆ Unable to crawl on hands and knees
- ◆ Has difficulty holding or using toys
- ◆ Has little interaction with people or toys
- ◆ Uses few or no speech sounds
- ◆ Does not use gestures: waving, high five
- ◆ Does not show understanding of words

10-12 Months continued

Activities to Enhance Development

- Provide safe areas to move and explore
- Hold hands if needed to walk, especially on uneven surfaces or stairs
- Build mountains with pillows for crawling over
- Scribble on paper
- Point to pictures to identify people, objects and toys
- Play hide-n-seek games
- Talk to baby throughout the day
- Talk with an adult tone: not baby talk
- Read books with simple pictures and stories
- Recite nursery rhymes and sing songs
- Identify and imitate environmental sounds such as birds and planes
- Use positive reinforcement for wanted behaviors and learning “no” behaviors

Appropriate Toys

- Push button toys or simple electronics
- Motion toys
- Stacking toys
- Cause and effect: push button toys
- Big peg boards
- Large crayons or markers
- Thick cardboard or hard plastic books
- Seat with tray for playing with toys or feeding self
- Mirror toys
- Pots and pans
- Different size toys
- Bath toys: squirt toys, floating toys



13-15 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Crawls upstairs
- ☐ Squats to pick up toys
- ☐ Throws ball overhand
- ☐ Stacks objects
- ☐ Uses several words with a variety of speech sounds
- ☐ Claps when excited
- ☐ Shows affection and interest in other children
- ☐ Follows simple directions like "Give me the toy"
- ☐ Holds own cup to drink
- ☐ Brings spoon to mouth: may spill some of the food
- ☐ Displays independent behavior



Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Cannot sit with back straight
- ◆ Walks up on toes most of the time
- ◆ Arms are held stiffly close to body
- ◆ Uses one arm to play most of the time
- ◆ Does not use arms, legs and/or hands well to play or feed self
- ◆ Uses only vowel sounds to talk: a, e, o, oo
- ◆ Does not speak using clear words
- ◆ Cannot follow simple commands

Activities to Enhance Development

- Baby-proof your house for safety
- Play push/ pull games
- Provide a variety of experiences and ways to play
- Cuddle frequently
- Give lots of attention for child's effort by saying "good job"
- Look at child when he/ she talks to you
- Identify or imitate sounds for your child
- Read to your child, point to pictures, encourage naming pictures
- Redirect tantrums or unwanted behaviors in a positive way. Tantrums are normal and expected
- Encourage feeding self: provide own dish, spoon, cup

Appropriate Toys

- Riding toys
- Playground and moving toys: swings, slides, spinning
- Stacking or nesting toys
- Blocks or balls
- Empty containers
- Action toys- something happens when button is pushed

16-18 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Walks without holding on to anyone or anything
- ☐ Climbs on and off furniture without help
- ☐ Stand on one foot with help
- ☐ Plays ball with another person: rolling, throwing, kicking, chasing
- ☐ Scribbles spontaneously
- ☐ Understands pointing
- ☐ Turns pages of a book
- ☐ Displays frequent tantrums
- ☐ Says "no" meaningfully
- ☐ Uses 20-50 words spontaneously
- ☐ Attempts to sing
- ☐ Shows understanding of color and size
- ☐ Removes socks
- ☐ Imitates housework
- ☐ Helps dress by pushing arms through sleeves or lifting foot
- ☐ Feeds self with fingers

Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Arms and/or legs cannot support weight
- ◆ Does not walk
- ◆ Loses balance or falls often when tries to walk
- ◆ Unable to hold objects in hands well

Activities to Enhance Development

- Playing ball
- Messy activities like finger painting
- Praise and encourage efforts in all areas: moving, playing, talking, singing
- Playing on playground
- Lots of interaction
- Read to your child

Appropriate Toys

- Sound makers: toy piano, tambourine, drums
- Push or pull toys
- Shape sorters
- Pegboards
- Simple puzzles
- Pop-beads or large stringing beads
- Books



19-21 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Walks backward and sideways
- ☐ Begins running
- ☐ Carries large toy while walking
- ☐ Unzips large zippers
- ☐ Imitates drawing a line with a marker
- ☐ Points to different body parts
- ☐ Matches objects
- ☐ Understands simple directions
- ☐ Expresses emotions
- ☐ Shows jealousy
- ☐ Gets frustrated easily
- ☐ Washes and dries hands
- ☐ Sleeps through the night



Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Unable to squat or bend down without losing balance
- ◆ Does not use hands or fingers well
- ◆ Unable to throw a ball
- ◆ Unable to stack objects
- ◆ Speaks only a few words
- ◆ Does not or cannot follow simple commands

Activities to Enhance Development

- Squatting or bending games
- Lifting and carrying objects
- Tumbling and rough house play with parents
- Reaching and moving arms in all directions
- Talking about new situations
- Avoid over-correcting effort to speak
- Always supervise

Appropriate Toys

- Water and pouring toys
- Hammering toys
- Child-size chairs
- Play kitchen

22-24 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Runs with good balance and coordination
- ☐ Knows and points to body parts
- ☐ Speaks in short phrases up to 5 words
- ☐ Makes needs known through speech
- ☐ Follows a variety of directions: put it here, sit next to grandpa
- ☐ Asks simple questions
- ☐ Sits on potty chair
- ☐ Uses cup for all drinking
- ☐ Plays with foods

Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Cannot crawl or walk
- ◆ Movements are poorly coordinated
- ◆ Difficult to understand most of speech
- ◆ Points or grunts to make needs known
- ◆ Does not follow commands

Activities to Enhance Development: always supervise

- Jumping, climbing, dancing
- Kicking, catching, throwing balls
- Swimming (always use safety float devices)
- Listen when your child talks to you
- Asks questions to stimulate thought and check understanding

Appropriate Toys

- Motion rides: bouncing, rocking, swinging, sliding
- Beads and puzzles
- Balls
- Markers and paper
- Books



25-36 Months

Typical Development

- ☐ Runs
- ☐ Walks on tiptoe short distances
- ☐ Throws a small ball overhand
- ☐ Tries to catch a large ball
- ☐ Kicks a ball forward
- ☐ Jumps off the ground
- ☐ Hops on 1 foot
- ☐ Climbs up and down a small slide
- ☐ Pedals a tricycle
- ☐ Uses toilet with help
- ☐ Dresses self with help for fasteners
- ☐ Feeds self with spoon or fork
- ☐ 75% of speech is understandable
- ☐ Speaks in complete sentences: 3-5 words
- ☐ Listens to short stories
- ☐ Tells simple stories from books or pictures
- ☐ Sings simple songs
- ☐ Asks questions: who, what, where, why?
- ☐ Follows two and three step commands
- ☐ Puts together simple puzzles:
up to 6 large pieces
- ☐ Draws a circle
- ☐ Can make simple choices
- ☐ Likes to make others laugh

Red Flags for Developmental Problems

- ◆ Unable or has difficulty moving
- ◆ Does not use both hands well
- ◆ Has difficulty feeding self
- ◆ Difficult to understand most speech
- ◆ Becomes frustrated easily and difficult to calm
- ◆ Seems too active or too lethargic

Appropriate Toys

- Books
- Markers and paper or coloring books
- Balls
- Riding toys including pedaling
- Playground



Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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