

Let's Talk Normal Development: Part I

So often we wonder how our children are progressing in their development. Although no two children develop the same way, there are expectations/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 bicycle without training wheels (7-8 years). Toilet training differs by culture. But in the U.S., 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 month and make a mark on the world. From two to four years, children are cutting with a scissors, stacking blocks and putting on articles of clothing. A four year old can dress and manipulate clothing fasteners. Let your child feed by themselves to understand texture and practice their abilities. A 4 _ year old will butter bread or make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Communicating starts early, with smiling and babbling and sharing. Saying words that are understandable to others becomes evident at 12 months of age. By two years, children are putting words together to share their thoughts. Seventy five percent of what is spoken by a three year old should be understood by all. And a four year old talks 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, eight to nine 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 with, playing and reading to a child encourages the child to explore with 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 therapist 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 question 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.