

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT -The Six Basics

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Children develop their milestones at different times and at their own pace. But sometimes parents can become anxious when their child hasn't developed in a certain area, for example not talking or walking like a friend's child of the same age. Understanding a little about child development can help to relieve some of that anxiety. It's like being able to see the whole puzzle instead of just the pieces in the corner. If a child isn't talking at the age of two years but is using gestures, body language and babbling sounds, she is communicating and that is an indication that she is developing language skills.

BRAIN POWER

Neuroscientists tell us that when a baby is born, the brain is the most developed organ in the body. A baby's early play experiences will continue developing parts of the brain as well as activating many genes. Some of the brain is so responsive, that this process will take place regardless of the quality of the baby's environment or the play experiences provided. However, other parts of the brain depend directly on EXPERIENCES.

Some sources state that at around 2 -3 years of age the brain develops faster than at any other time, laying down a blueprint for how we think, feel and behave. We are beginning to get the message from researchers, neuroscientists and academics that a 'window of opportunity' for brain development occurs the most rapidly from 0-8 years of age. There is also general agreement (which is forming social policy in some countries) that the early years are a crucial developmental time in a child's life.

If parents want to take advantage of this stage in their child's life to encourage and support their development, an understanding of the six areas of development will help to them make wise decisions about what toys, books, equipment, art, craft and language experiences their child is capable of experiencing and learning from. Their role as parents and the way they organize the home environment and play experiences will also have a large part to play in their child's learning and development.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Some educators like to combine and even assess social and emotional development in children due to their interconnectedness. Emotional development is however a unique skill base that requires young children to learn to regulate their emotions, feel good about themselves, take risks and develop resilience. Emotional development progresses when the bond of attachment with one or more significant adult is in place. Once this is established, children will gain skills necessary to control fear, anxiety, excitement, anger and even shyness. A child's temperament does play a part in their emotional development and can affect how confident they feel, how trusting they are of others and what risks they are prepared to take. .

Young children need to feel safe and secure in order to form trusting relationships. As a parent, you can make your child feel safe and secure by: Responding to their basic needs promptly. Responding to their cues (for example infants have a different cry for different needs). Making quality time to spend together (reading ritual, going for a walk, cooking). Initiating and participating in their play. Providing a predictable daily routine.

Giving physical comfort as needed. Being authentic and honest (for example returning when you say you are going to). Providing secondary attachments such as books, puzzles, and games etc which act as a ritual that you experience or play with together if your child experiences separation anxiety.

All of these parent actions help to nurture the early attachment bond, promote resilience and the ability to cope with changes and they play a big part in facilitating learning and development in early childhood.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This affects how children interact with others, how they share, participate in play involving one or more children, accept rules and cooperate with peers. Often children around two years will find this a difficult stage in their development so repetition and patience is the key here. Learning social rules in terms of standards of hygiene, eating and behaving in public places are also a part of children's social development so don't underestimate the value of social development when taking that trip to the shops or cafe with your child. Remember that a child's temperament can affect their shyness and how they socialize, communicate and develop relationships with others. Shy children will take longer to develop these skills.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

This is commonly known as 'head to toe' development and is divided into gross motor and fine motor skills. Gross motor is the development of large muscles that control different parts of the body such as legs, arms and trunk. Ball games, bike riding, climbing, walking, swimming and running all help develop gross motor skills. Fine Motor, is the development of small muscles that control small objects (Lego type toys) threading, catching and holding a pen/pencil/paint brush or rolling, squashing pounding play dough.

LANGUAGE and LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Children immersed in language and literacy in the home, have been found to do better at school and it begins pre-birth. As infants hear music in the womb they are able to connect that rhythm and beat to sounds they hear after birth. Language and literacy includes verbal and print media so books posters, signs and symbols in the environment stimulate conversations. Language also includes non-verbal communication through body language, gestures and facial expressions. The development of communication therefore, requires plenty of opportunities for children to practice speech. This is where talking to and with your child will make a big difference. Play environments where dressing up, pretending, drawing, storytelling, having puppets, painting music and songs all help children develop pre reading and writing skills. Basically every opportunity to interact lends itself to developing language and literacy skills from pre-birth to primary school. Most children immersed in language at home, develop strong language and literacy skills.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

This is also called Intellectual development and this is about developing thinking and reasoning skills. The ability to remember people, names, places, songs, rhymes etc. To be able to sort, classify, estimate and concentrate. Using information in order to hypothesize, solve problems and discover new ways of doing things are all important cognitive skills that lead to scientific, mathematical and linguistic concepts later. Card games such as snap and lotto, puzzles, cooking together (talking about the ingredients and volume and measurement)

shopping together, reading aloud to your child and asking and answering questions all help to develop cognitive skills. Preschoolers will often ask the most profound questions and we often don't have the answers, encouraging them to take the journey of discovery with you ("let's find out together") will demonstrate to them that knowledge is in our heads but comes from outside as well as inside experiences.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

This is defined as the ability or quality to express yourself in your own way. Children are naturally creative and they express their creativity in areas of art, language, music, dance, dramatic play, outdoor play and everyday experiences. Children's creativity can become stifled when we prescribe what an object should look like for example; "this is how you draw a bunny rabbit" and proceed to show them how to draw it. Creativity can also be stifled when we see a child drawing and ask them "what is it?" when in fact it may not be definable or it may simply not be anything...just lines or dots or a pattern being explored. Children will develop their natural innate creativity if we give them permission, encouragement and provide the props and opportunities for them to let their imagination run wild!

Each day parents make decisions about what activities or experiences their child will participate in. Sometimes they will spend lots of money buying products that amuse their child for a while but cannot sustain their interest or have no developmental value. Next time you go shopping for a toy or plan an activity at home, think about which areas of your child's development you are catering for. Observe their interests, strengths and weaknesses. What they value and what they fear. [The decisions you make today will affect their love of learning tomorrow.....and the next dayand the next.](#)

Happy parenting!

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