

WHY THE EARLY YEARS ARE SO IMPORTANT



While children’s brains will continue to develop throughout their lives, the most active period of brain development begins during the last trimester of pregnancy and lasts until 18 months of age. During this period, how well a child’s physical, social and emotional needs are met affects how the child’s brain will grow and develop. Understanding how children grow and learn will help you know what to expect and what you can do to help your child develop all of his or her abilities.

The four main areas of child development are **physical, social, emotional** and **cognitive**.

Physical Development is the growth of the human body including: height, weight, muscles and the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell). Coordination of large and small muscle movements is also part of physical development.

Social Development is the ability to connect with others, understand rules and develop values, and cooperate as a member of a family, peer group and society.

Emotional Development is the ability to understand and express feelings and control emotions.

Cognitive Development is the ability to learn and to use logic and reason to solve problems.

Development in each of the four areas is tightly connected. For example, learning to talk requires hearing (physical), the ability to understand different sounds (cognitive), the ability to pay attention (social), and the ability to interact with others (emotional). Failing to progress in one area affects the ability to progress in all other areas.

Development in each of these areas happens in stages and each child will develop at his or her own rate. Developmental guidelines simply show what a child of that age could do—if not right now, then soon. If your child was premature, keep in mind that babies born early usually need a bit more time to meet their milestones. Professionals like doctors, nurses, early learning providers and home visitors can help you track your child’s development, identify possible concerns and make referrals for help when needed. Discovering and treating health issues or developmental delays early can help prevent more serious problems later in life.

A Word about Discipline and Safety

As children grow and develop, their needs for discipline and safety will change. Discipline, which means “to teach,” is not something infants or toddlers can understand. They also do not understand danger. Babies are curious and will play with just about anything. The only way to discipline an infant is to make sure they are safe in their surroundings so they can explore and learn about the world. For example, if you do not want your baby to stick his finger in the electrical outlet, then you need to cover the outlet with safety caps. More examples of how to meet your child’s needs for discipline and safety at each stage of development are included in the following pages of this booklet.

WORTH NOTING

CHILDPROOFING alone will not keep your child safe. Childproofing increases the amount of time it takes for your child to get into a dangerous situation, but it does not replace ADULT SUPERVISION.