

Understanding Your Child's Development

It was fun to help with my grandson's recent birthday party when he turned two. It's important that adults, including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other caregivers understand that every child develops at his or her own pace.

The ages and stages below indicate the average ages and typical skills during early childhood. As children develop, parents and others tend to focus on the expected language, social, mental, and physical milestones.

Bear in mind that the ages below are approximate, and that some children will have skills usually occurring in older children, and others will have skills usually occurring in younger children. If a child's development seems to be lagging behind in certain areas, share your concerns with an early childhood professional to schedule developmental screenings.

At age 2, your child might have mastered these skills:

Language skills. Speaks at least 50 words. Links two words together, such as "my cup" or "no juice." Speaks clearly enough for parents to understand about half of the words the child says.

Social skills. Shows more independence. Becomes defiant. Mimics others (including animals, children, and adults). Gets excited when with other children, and engages with them.

Mental skills. Plays simple make-believe games. Begins to sort objects by shape and color. Finds hidden objects.

Physical skills. Stands on tiptoes. Begins to run. Kicks a ball. Jumps a short distance.

At age 3, your child might have mastered these skills:

Language skills. Speaks 250 to 500 words or more. Speaks in three- and four-word sentences. Correctly uses pronouns (I, you, me, mine). States his or her first name. Speaks clearly enough for strangers to understand about 75 percent of the time.

Social skills. Takes turns. Expresses affection openly. Easily separates from parents. Gets upset with major changes in routine.

Mental skills. Turns book pages one at a time. Copies a circle. Does puzzles with three or four pieces.

Physical skills. Walks up and down stairs, alternating feet. Climbs, runs, and pedals a tricycle.