



Your Child's Development From Birth to 3 Years

Your child's experiences in the early months and years of life affect their health, well-being, and coping skills for the rest of their life. Your caring, nurturing, and safe parenting help ensure your baby's optimal development. Watch and listen to your baby to learn what your baby wants or needs. Your baby will give you cues to help you know what they are saying. During the toddler years, your child will grow and learn rapidly.

Experts divide child development into 5 areas: physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language.

The stages of child development described here are guidelines only, not a set of rules. Learning about child development can guide your parenting. If you have any concerns about your child's development, talk to your health care provider.

From birth to 3 months, your baby:

- Recognizes parents' voices, right from birth
- Discovers their own voice
- Enjoys eye contact, smiles at people and studies faces
- Cries as a way of communicating needs
- Coos and gurgles happily when given attention
- Startles at noise and responds to sounds in time
- Stretches or moves arms and legs
- Lifts head when lying on tummy
- Holds head up to search for sounds and movement
- Rolls over to one side
- Discovers feet and hands and holds objects
- Follows moving objects with their eyes

From 3 to 6 months, your baby:

- Lifts head about 90 degrees
- Sits with some support
- Stands up with help
- Rolls over

- Reaches for and lets go of objects
- Responds to their name
- Enjoys social interaction
- Shows interest in colours
- Recognizes faces and shows a preference for familiar people
- Laughs and squeals when happy
- If a toy is moved from sight, thinks it no longer exists

From 6 to 12 months, your baby:

- Recognizes their name
- Responds to some words, such as 'Mommy' or 'Daddy'
- Says or repeats sounds, or babbles
- Mimics simple actions and other children or people
- Shows strong feelings and emotions about likes and dislikes or being happy or sad
- Sits steadily without help for longer periods
- Drinks water from a lidless cup
- Stands firmly with help or when held
- Can move or shuffle on belly and then crawl
- Takes first steps and walks alone, between 8 and 18 months of age
- Enjoys crawling and walking
- Loves being the centre of attention
- Gets scared around strangers and cries when parents leave
- Throws toys or objects on purpose
- Plays social games, such as 'peekaboo' or 'patty cake'
- With all the exciting changes in their life, your child may wake up more frequently at night

From 12 to 18 months, your child:

- Has lots of energy and wants to explore everything

- Can feed themselves using fingers or a spoon
- May climb out of the crib
- Walks alone and walks upstairs 1 step at a time
- Speaks in short phrases, such as “mama go?” or “all done.”
- Understands basic sentences and uses 1 word – for example, says “more” for “I want more”
- Names pictures in a book
- Follows simple directions
- Understands much more than they can say
- Enjoys being the centre of attention
- Plays best by themselves and is unlikely to share toys
- Cooperates or resists limits parents set
- Gets frustrated easily, is impatient and wants things now
- Cries less but whines more
- Uses the word ‘no’ correctly or shakes head
- May have a special toy or blanket
- Has a short memory and does actions again even if you tell them not to. May do the opposite of what you tell them to do
- Dances to music
- Tells stories, sings songs, and plays
- Tries to do more independently
- Helps with simple household chores, such as taking laundry out of the dryer
- Has trouble sharing and says ‘no’ or ‘mine’
- Becomes familiar with routines
- Recognizes and names familiar people
- Shows interest in a new person, thing, or sound
- Enjoys playing alone and near other children
- By 36 months, enjoys pretend play with others
- Shows an increased attention span
- Solves problems by trial and error
- Participates in group activities
- Shows affection openly, such as hugging
- Uses social language, such as please and thank you
- Copies adult behaviours
- Gets frustrated sometimes because they want to do more than they are able to do
- Tries to be the boss but needs to know that parents set limits
- Has a lot of fears and may have nightmares

From 18 to 36 months, your child:

- Uses 2 or 3-word sentences
- Asks for help using words or actions
- Can count and use new words
- Understands shapes and sizes
- Shows emotions and has mood swings or tantrums
- Knows and responds to others’ feelings
- Wants approval and needs praise
- Asks a lot of questions
- Responds to requests, such as ‘Get your coat’
- Gradually uses 1 hand more than the other
- Can walk up and down stairs
- Can learn to ride a tricycle
- Can run, climb, kick, and throw a ball

For More Information

For more information about child health and development, see the following resources:

- [HealthLinkBC File #92a Your Child and Play From Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92c Your Child’s Feelings](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92d Toilet Learning](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92e Time for Bed](#)
- Healthy Families BC - www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting
- Baby’s Best Chance (PDF 16.67 MB) - www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/BabysBestChance-Sept2017.pdf

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthlinkbcfiles or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.