

Having Appropriate Expectations of Children

Everyone comes into the world with a genetic makeup, or nature. It's theirs and theirs alone. Height, skin color, hair color, gender, and other physical features are the obvious. Temperament, sexual preference, predisposition to alcoholism, to cancer, and to other illnesses are some of the not so obvious that are also a part of us. But the environment can influence these predispositions and how, or if, they'll play out.

Developmental Stages

There are four things we know about child development:

1. All children are pre-disposed with certain characteristics but the brain of a young child is still developing.
2. All children go through developmental stages with certain tasks and accomplishments needing to be met to move on to the next stage.
3. The expectations parents and other adults have for children grossly affects whether childhood will be a nurturing experience or not.
4. No child is "average" in all areas of growth. Children are unique and each child has their own capabilities. To expect all children in one family to accomplish tasks at the same age is inappropriate.

Why Learn About Developmental Stages?

We learn about developmental stages because we want to become the best parents we can. We also learn about developmental stages because it makes the life of being an infant and a young child easier and happier. Being an infant is not always that pleasant. There are very few things infants can do by themselves besides sleep, cry, wet and soil themselves, and burp. They even have to learn to turnover once they're lying on their backs. It's not simple. Life gets easier as infants get older because they can do more things independently.

But imagine if parents didn't know what infants or children were capable of doing at different times in their lives. Childhood would be a frustrating experience. We might be asking small infants to feed themselves, or young children to set the table, cook the meals, and do the dishes. When such inappropriate expectations are placed on children, the children can't complete the task, and they begin to feel badly about themselves.

Developmental Stages and Self-Concept

When we complete a task, no matter if it is a large or small task, we usually feel as if we accomplished something. People often notice our accomplishments and usually praise us for our efforts. The praise we receive helps build in us positive feelings about our self. We develop positive self-worth.

Trouble begins to occur when we constantly fail to accomplish something. No one recognizes our efforts and we don't receive any praise. In fact, we often receive just the opposite - criticism about how we can't do anything or how bad we are. When this happens often, we begin to believe we can't do anything and begin to feel badly about ourselves. A negative self-worth grows.

The importance of development and self-worth is extremely critical in the growth of children. Self-worth begins very early in life based on how capable we feel we are in pleasing our parents. After all, children want to please the very people they are dependent upon.

When the expectations placed on children or infants are inappropriate, that is, children don't complete the task or do the activity because they are too young and don't have the skills, children see themselves as failures. Failures are children who can't seem to please mom and dad no matter how hard they try. When mom and dad are not pleased, they don't offer any praise. Without praise from mom and dad, it is nearly impossible for children to feel good about themselves and develop positive self-worth. Without positive self-worth, the chances of children trying new tasks or being successful are slim. This failure carries over to school where children will often see themselves as incapable and less bright than the other children.

Primary Areas of Development

There are four primary stages of development all children go through.

Physical Development

Physical development means that as children get older, they usually get bigger. Usually when they get older and bigger, their gross motor and fine motor skills increase. Gross motor means activities like running, throwing, jumping, crawling, etc. Fine motor means activities like writing, holding a fork and knife, using scissors, etc. Physical development is important for helping children not only to increase their skills, but also organize their behaviors.

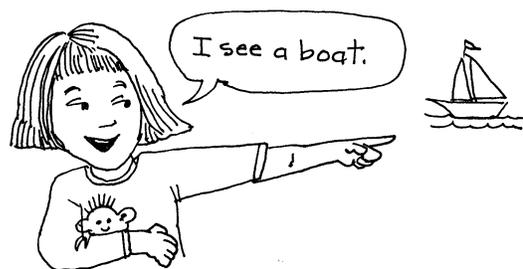


Intellectual Development

Intellectual development means that children learn more the older they get. They learn to recognize shapes and colors, recite the alphabet, figure out problems, and many other things. These intellectual abilities continue to increase, as children grow older, but stimulation is necessary in order for these intellectual capabilities to occur. Without stimulation, these capabilities may lag behind or fail to develop.

Language Development

Language development means that as children grow older, their communication skills increase. Their ability to use words, phrases, and sentences in writing and in conversation helps them gain mastery of their environment by expressing their needs and understanding the needs of others. Language expands from a few simple sounds during the first year of life, to the use of thousands of words in their teen years. Talking to children when they're babies and continuing good communication skills throughout childhood is an essential quality of nurturing parenting.



Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development go hand-in-hand. The way we treat children and the care they receive affect the way they mature, and are capable of interacting with others. Children's emotional growth goes from an early stage of dependence and taking to a later stage of independence and giving. In this area, the ability for a child to use their physical, intellectual, and language skills to the best of their abilities and in positive ways hinges on how well children develop socially and emotionally.

**What is Important to Learn**

Listed in the following pages is information about developmental stages that you should know. Having a good working knowledge of what your children can or can't do will help you in having appropriate developmental expectations of your children. In turn, you will encourage your children to meet success and reinforce positive feelings about themselves.

Developmental Summaries

The developmental summaries of children, located on the following pages, serve as a rough guide to normal child development. It should be noted that the lists serve only as a summary and are not a complete index of all the things children can do at any given stage. Children born with birth problems such as prematurity, low birth weight, or illness may not be able to do the things that other children can do who didn't have problems at birth. Most likely, such children will be behind and will need more time to catch up. Only with the support of their family will children with special developmental needs, grow to the fullest of their capabilities.