What are developmental milestones?

As children grow, they develop specific abilities, like walking up stairs or recognizing colors. These are called developmental milestones. An active child will develop physical skills more quickly. A shy child may be slower to develop speech. Both of these situations can be perfectly normal. So instead of asking whether your child is normal, you may find it more helpful to ask whether your child has reached specific developmental milestones.

The following pages list several important milestones grouped by the age at which most children reach them. By learning when children usually develop certain abilities, parents and caregivers can understand when a child is doing fine and when a child may need more help.

When should I call Early Stages?

The earlier a child receives services, the more likely it is that their needs will be reduced or even eliminated as they get older. If you are concerned about how your child is walking, talking, playing, learning, or behaving, trust your instincts and contact us. Children referred to Early Stages receive a developmental screening. If necessary, your child will receive a more in-depth evaluation.

Some of the services that Early Stages can recommend include specialized instruction, speech/language therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychological services, and behavioral support services. All of our services are free.

- For children between the ages of 2 years 8 months and 5 years 10 months, call Early Stages at 202-698-8037 or visit our website at www.earlystagesdc.org.
- For children under 2 years 8 months, call Strong Start, the DC Early Intervention Program, at 202-727-3665.

What can I do to support my child’s development?

Listed below are activities in the five main areas of development. Try to make each activity more difficult as your child grows older or gets better at that skill.

**COMMUNICATION**
- Play "I Spy." Give clues about an object you see in the room and ask your child to guess what it is.
- Use parallel talk. Describe what your child is doing, seeing or feeling, such as "you’re throwing the ball."

**GROSS MOTOR**
- Take your child to the playground. Practice climbing up the slide and sliding down or play hopscotch together.
- Play "Simon Says." Give your child directions such as "Simon says walk on your tiptoes" or "Simon says skip across the room."

**FINE MOTOR**
- Draw shapes with a pencil or crayon. Ask your child to draw the shapes next to yours without tracing.
- Teach your child how to use child-safe scissors. Show him or her how to make the blades go up and down. Practice cutting straight lines and shapes.

**PROBLEM SOLVING**
- Place objects of different sizes and textures in a grab bag. Let your child feel the objects without looking. Ask him or her to guess what each object is.
- Plan a treasure hunt. Draw a map or give your child clues about how to find an object hidden in the room.

**PERSONAL SOCIAL**
- Play dress-up or make-believe. Children can use action-figures, puppets or dolls to act out different scenes.
- Let your child help at mealtimes. They can practice pouring milk or juice into a cup or using a spoon to scoop food onto their own plate.
By their **FIRST BIRTHDAY**, most babies:
- Crawl
- Pull self up to stand
- Walk holding onto furniture
- May walk few steps without help
- Grasp with fingers
- Say "dada" and "mama"
- Try to imitate words
- Respond to "no" and simple requests
- Use simple gestures, such as shaking head, and waving bye-bye
- Explore objects
- Begin to use objects (drinking from cup, brushing hair)
- Find hidden objects easily1

By their **SECOND BIRTHDAY**, most children:
- Roll over stomach to back and back to stomach
- Sit up
- Reach for objects
- Move objects from one hand to the other
- Support weight on legs when held up
- See in color
- See at a distance
- Use voice to express feelings
- Respond to own name
- Babble
- Understand emotions by tone of voice
- Explore objects with hands and mouth
- Struggle to get objects that are out of reach
- Enjoy playing peek-a-boo
- Show an interest in mirrors1

By their **THIRD BIRTHDAY**, most children:
- Can do some things for themselves (like putting on clothes and feeding self)
- Enjoy playing imaginatively and with other kids
- Tell stories with 2 to 3 sentences
- Can be understood more than half of the time
- Can name a friend
- Know whether they are a boy or girl
- Build a tower of 6 to 8 blocks
- Throw a ball overhand
- Ride a tricycle
- Walk up stairs alternating feet
- Balance on 1 foot for 2 seconds
- Copy a circle
- Draw a person with 2 body parts (head and one other part)
- Are toilet trained during the daytime2

By their **FOURTH BIRTHDAY**, most children:
- Are more likely to agree to rules
- Like to sing, dance, and act
- Able to distinguish fantasy from reality
- Recall part of a story
- Speak sentences of more than 5 words
- Know their name and address
- Can count 10 or more objects
- Correctly name at least 4 colors
- Stand on one foot for 10 seconds or longer
- Hop, swing, and climb
- Copy a triangle and other geometric patterns
- Print some letters of the alphabet
- Use a fork and spoon
- Dress and undress without assistance2

By their **FIFTH BIRTHDAY**, most children:
- Can follow family rules
- Play with favorite toys
- Listen to stories
- Engage in fantasy play
- Know first and last name
- Sing a song or say a poem from memory
- Know what to do if cold, tired, or hungry
- Can be understood
- Name 4 colors
- Play board/card games
- Draw a picture with 2 parts
- Copy a cross
- Can eat by themselves
- Brush their teeth
- Can dress self

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1. 0-2 year milestones: March of Dimes (www.marchofdimes.com)
2. 3-5 year milestones: American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)