

Principles of Child Development

Child development has been a topic of interest for many years to scientists, parents, and people who work with, and study, children. Until recent years, theories and observations about how children developed were made by observing children's growth, behaviors, learning of language, how they play and work with others, and what they know. In other words, we could see evidence of child development, but we did not know how it was happening. Today, with new technology, we are beginning to understand how development occurs and the importance of parents, teachers, and child care providers in the development of children.

Child development experts have developed theories to explain their observations of child development. Here are some of the theories or models they have created.

Developmental Models:

- Development proceeds from the large to the small. This refers to the observation that infants' gain control or mastery over their large muscles before they gain mastery over their small muscles. Large muscles are in the trunk and neck area. Small muscles are in the hands and feet.
- Development proceeds from the center of the body out. This was based on similar observations.
- Development proceeds from head to toe. Upper body muscles, neck, chest, arms, develop before lower body muscles.
- Development is orderly. Children usually have to learn one skill or develop in one area before they can learn another skill. For example, infants crawl before they walk, eat soft foods before solid foods, and coo and babble before they form words.
- Development occurs in stages. Children seem to go through stages of development where a lot of changes will occur followed by a period of little noticeable changes before the next level of development occurs.
- Some theorists believed that children were born knowing nothing – blank states – and that development depended almost totally on their parents and their environment. Inheritance was not very important in this theory.
- Other theorists believed that children were born with everything they needed to develop in a normal and healthy way if they were provided with their basic needs and otherwise not interfered with as they grew. These people believed that genetics or inheritance played the larger role in how children developed.

The development theories we have been discussing were developed as scientists studied children by looking at the changes that happened over time. Much of how children develop has remained a mystery through the centuries. Today's technology is allowing us to look inside the human brain to see how development occurs. This information has shown us how important parents and other care givers are to children from before birth to adulthood. The new evidence shows that the most critical time for

development of certain areas such as language and vision is during the first three years. Other less obvious characteristics that develop early in life include the ability to form close mutual relationships with other humans and the ability to have empathy for another person. We now know that children are neither blank slates who have no influence on their own development, nor masters of their own destiny. What we do know is that parents, teachers, and care givers play a very important role in how well the development that begins before birth continues throughout life.

Developmental Stages of Infants

Areas of Development	Birth to 2 Months	2 - 3 Months	4 - 6 Months	7 - 9 Months	10 - 12 Months
Physical Development	Knows mother by her smell. Will turn head toward sounds. Is only able to see clearly a distance of around 2 feet.	Is able to hold a finger or rattle. Can hold up head when laying on stomach. Is starting to eat and sleep more regularly.	Will reach for objects, roll over, and sit with support. Gets first teeth. Is better able to see things far away. Can take solid foods at 6 months.	Begins to crawl. Is able to sit alone for a short time. Uses thumb and pointing finger to pick up objects.	Drinks from a cup. Can eat with fingers. Pulls to a stand and stands alone. Walks holding onto objects. Can throw a ball.
Mental Development	Can copy facial expressions of adults such as frowns, smiles or surprise as early as 2 days of age.	When a adult talks to the infant, he or she coos and makes sounds in response. Having someone read to him/her helps the brain develop.	Responds with sounds and movements when others talk to him/her. Is learning to wait while other talk, ant to 'talk' back when it is his or her turn.	Copies speech sounds. Knows what will happen next when someone begins to prepare for bath or meals. Responds when he/she hears name.	May say first words. Plays peek-a-boo and learns that things don't disappear because he/she can't see them. Likes being read to.
Emotional Development	When the parent responds to the baby's cries, the baby learns how to control his or her emotions and to calm himself.	Infants tell that something is wrong by crying. Cries for a wet diaper will be different from cries for hunger or pain.	Is learning how to feel joy and pleasure. If his/her needs are not met, this feeling is greatly reduced. Shows fear and anger.	Learns to respond to new events by following how the parent or care giver responds – fearful, happy, excited.	Has many different emotions. Uses crying, sounds, actions, and facial expressions to show emotions.
Social Development	Has different response to mothers & fathers. Tends to be calm and relaxed with mother and to be excited and active around father. Is forming strong bond to mother.	Comforting by a parent or care giver helps infant to soothe self. Lots of loving touches and eye contact are needed to help develop bonds with others.	Is able to have a strong bond (called attachment) to more than one person. Enjoys "talking" and playing with adults and older children.	May begin to cling to parent when the parent is about to leave. Will learn that separation is not permanent when parent returns time after time.	Recognizes familiar people. Is able to express his/her own needs more clearly.

How Parents Can Help

- ☺ Crying is the first way babies can tell others what they need. Parents can help the baby develop a sense of trust and to feel secure by coming when the baby cries. Over time parents are able to tell what babies need – food, a dry diaper, or just to be held – by the sound of the cries. If parents respond to young babies when they cry, the babies will cry less when they are older than will babies whose parents did not come when they cried.
- ☺ Hold your baby so that she can look at your face while you feed her. Whether you breast or bottle-feed, your baby needs that time to bond with you. Talk to your baby during feeding. Give him lots of strokes and touches.
- ☺ Read and sing to your baby. Children learn to talk by hearing others speak. Babies like board books with pictures of other babies or familiar objects like balls and bottles. Babies love rhymes, songs, and picture books.
- ☺ Be sure to take your baby to the doctor or health department for follow-up visits after birth and for needed shots. Breast-feed if possible. Follow your doctor's or health department's advice about starting solid foods.
- ☺ Put the baby to bed on his or her back. Remove pillows, stuffed toys, and fluffy blankets from the bed. If a blanket is needed, only bring it up as high as under the arms and tuck it in at the bottom. Some babies have smothered on soft bedding.
- ☺ Choose with care the person who takes care of your child. Choose someone who will be able to spend time holding and talking to your baby and who will be sure that the area is safe and clean. If you feel uneasy with a child care provider, find a new one as soon as you can.
- ☺ Provide a safe home for your baby. As he begins to crawl, it is important to remove unsafe objects from his reach. Be sure that electric outlets have safety caps on them. Keep him away from electric cords or equipment that gets hot or uses electricity.
- ☺ Prepare a safe place in your house for your baby to crawl around and explore. Babies learn by exploring and their muscles get the exercise they need to grow strong.
- ☺ Keep small objects away from infants. They like to put everything in their mouths. Babies might swallow small objects and choke.

Developmental Stages of Toddlers and Preschoolers

Area of Development	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years
Physical Development	Walks, runs, climbs, steps, and explores	Goes up and down steps alone, runs, uses spoon and fork, turns pages in books, kicks a ball, tries to dress self, may be ready for toilet training.	Runs well, marches, rides tricycle. Can feed self. Pours from pitcher. Puts on shoes and socks, buttons and unbuttons. Builds 10-block tower.	Is awkward when cutting with scissors. Can wash face and dress self except for tying shoes. Throws ball overhand. Has lots of energy.	Hops, skips, and has good balance. Dresses without help and ties shoes. Can print simple letters. Is right or left-handed.
Mental Development	Can name animals and people from pictures. Uses blocks for building. Doesn't know what is unsafe.	Knows around 270 words. Says phrases and simple sentences. Understands simple commands. Can sit and listen only for a very short time.	Says short sentences. Knows around 900 words. Tells simple stories and makes up stories. Answers questions. May say a few nursery rhymes.	Uses complete sentences. Knows around 1,500 words. Is always asking why. Likes to pretend. Drawings can be recognized.	Knows up to 2,000 words. Tells long stories. Follows commands well. Counts to 10 or more and knows colors. Starting to know fact from fiction.
Emotional Development	Is moody.	Is learning that she is a separate person. Likes to be held and hugged. Is selfish with own things. Gets angry when he can't do something.	Likes to please parents. Easy to get along with. Feels more secure and has better sense of who he is. Likes music.	Seems sure of self. May not obey limits, tests rules, and often says no. Needs freedom with limits.	Self-assured, stable & well-adjusted. Likes to be around mother and likes to be at home. Likes to follow rules. Likes being given jobs to do.
Social Development	Plays near but not with other children. Will not share. Likes to be chased and may run into the street to be chased.	Plays alone. Needs an adult to guide play. Plays with dolls. Refers to self by name. Doesn't see others as people.	Likes being with other children. Can take turns. Knows he is a boy or she is a girl. Likes to help. Enjoys some group games. Responds to guidance.	Plays well with other children and is friendly with others. Plays group games. Talks a lot. Can do many different things.	Prefers to play with and can plan games with others. Likes to take turns and follow rules of simple games. Proud of good grades and what he. Has best friends.

How Parents Can Help

- ☺ Talk to your child as you go about your daily activities. If you are cooking a meal, talk about what you are doing. Talk about why you do the things you do. Let your preschoolers help when possible. Let them help make the bed. You can show them how to do each step. They can pick up their toys and put them in a box or basket. They can put dirty clothes into a basket.
- ☺ Talk to your child in a normal tone of voice as you do with older children and adults.
- ☺ Watch toddlers closely as they play. Try to prevent problems before they happen. If one child gets angry with another, take the child to another activity.
- ☺ Tell your child what to do instead of focusing on what not to do. Instead of saying “Don’t play in the street,” say “Play in the backyard where I can see you.”
- ☺ “Child proof” your home. Put away objects that are easily broken. Store medicines and cleaning products in locked cabinets where children cannot reach them. Put outlet covers on unused electrical outlets. Choose toys that do not have small parts that could come off and choke a child. Look at the recommended ages on toy packages. When your child goes toward a dangerous object or place, firmly say “No!”, and show the child what you want him to do instead.
- ☺ Read to your children. Let them choose the books. They may choose the same books over and over. This helps them to learn to read. Let them tell you stories, too.
- ☺ Set a routine for going to bed. It might include bathing, brushing teeth, reading a story, and saying a prayer. Following the same routine each night helps the child know what to expect. She will be less likely to put up a fuss.
- ☺ When your child is behaving well, comment on it. Saying “I like the way you are sharing with your brother”, or “Thank you for picking up your toys” teaches the child that good behavior brings positive attention from parents.
- ☺ Listen when your child talks to you. Show that you understand how she feels. Saying “You were afraid when you saw the dog” or “You are excited about going to the store” tells your child that you are listening to what he is saying.
- ☺ Plan ahead to avoid behavior problems. Make a plan about how children are to behave when you go to the store. You may want to give a reward if they do well. Try to have a snack for them to eat before shopping so that they won’t be begging for other foods they see. If they are tired, it is a good idea to let them nap before going out in public. If you are going somewhere where there will be a long wait such as the doctor’s office, take along a favorite toy or some books for the children to play with while waiting and a snack in case they get hungry.

Developmental Stages of Children

Areas of Development	6 Years	7-8 Years	9-10 Years
Physical Development	Competes with friends. Loves to cut, color, and shape things. Has lots of energy.	Likes learning how to use tools. Can bathe and dress with a little help from parents. Is losing baby teeth and growing permanent teeth.	Hormones that start sexual maturity begin to work (some girls begin their periods at this age.) Likes crafts and skills that use fine muscles.
Mental Development	Is learning to read; learning how to think things through. Learns best by working with materials and people. Needs to practice at home what is learned at school.	Likes doing things over and over. Likes to read. Enjoys secret codes or languages. Likes to have successes noticed. Wants to know how things work. Likes routines and rituals.	Learns and understand rules. Thinks in more adult terms. Enjoys learning about different people and places. Likes to collect things. Enjoys group projects.
Emotional Development	Has mood swings; is easily hurt.	Very concerned about right and wrong. Develops strong likes and dislikes. Points out when parents are wrong or do things they tell children not to do.	Changes in body can be frightening, especially if monthly period has begun. Children vary greatly in rates of growth and often are self-conscious if they are much taller or much shorter than peers.
Social Development	Can be bossy with friends and family. May switch friends often. Likes to help with chores such as preparing meals and shopping for groceries.	Plays well with other children, but parents are still the most important role models.	Peers are important. Needs some privacy at home. Likes to be in planned group activities such as sports. Enjoys one-on-one time with adults.

How Parents Can Help

- ☺ Give children things to read at home. Let them read to you from their school books and from books they check out from the library. Let them read labels as you shop for food. Let them read road signs when you travel.
- ☺ Read books with your children. Take turns reading to each other. Let your children see you reading. This will help your child to want to read.
- ☺ Give children lots of chances to use their hands to cut, paste, paint, or shape things. This will exercise their minds and their small muscles.
- ☺ Let your child to join groups with activities for children such as church, scouts, 4-H, or group sports. This will help your children to meet other children and have fun while learning. Make sure that adults you trust will be supervising the activities.
- ☺ Take your children to visit places and people in the community. Take them to the fire station, the library, a local museum, or for a ride in the country. Let them describe what they see to you. Let them talk to other people, especially older people. This will help them connect to their history and heritage.
- ☺ Help your children to understand when they hurt others' feelings. Saying things like "I feel hurt when you talk to me that way" or "When you boss your friends around, they don't like it," will help them to begin thinking about how others feel. This is called *empathy*.
- ☺ Teach your children what is right and wrong. What you teach is most important to your child. If you do something that is wrong say, "I was wrong to do that; I'm sorry," or "I apologize."
- ☺ Let your children help with house work. It may take longer to have your children to help you than to do it yourself, but you are teaching them important skills they will use the rest of their lives.
- ☺ Talk with your children about the sexual changes that will happen as they grow. Girls as young as nine years may begin to have their periods. Girls need to know what to expect before their period starts. Boys need to know about changes in their bodies as well. If you feel uncomfortable talking about sexual changes, check with the health department, school nurse, or library to get booklets or books you can read together. If you talk to your children about sexual topics, they will be more likely to come to you with questions when they need information.
- ☺ Try to make a place for each child that can be their own. This may be moving furniture or making a special place for children to keep their personal items.
- ☺ Make a comfortable place for your children to study. Set a time each evening when everyone in the family will study or have quiet time, including you. Turn off the TV. Look at what your children are doing. Talk to them about school. Visit their teachers and see what you need to do to help them succeed in school.

Developmental Stages of Teens

Areas of Development	Early Teens: 11 - 13 Years	Middle Teens: 14 - 16 Years	Late Teens: 17 - 19 Years
Physical Development	They may show talent for sport at this stage. As they grow taller, they may become awkward – all arms and legs. Hormones start to flow. This begins sexual development. Physically, girls mature earlier than boys.	They need lots of rest – more than at any time since they were babies. Sexual growth continues. They may worry about their weight because looking good and being popular are important to them. Teens who are slow to grow may have low self-esteem.	Girls complete physical and sexual growth. Boys may continue to grow through late teen years and into their early 20s. Weight and being fit are concerns to older teens.
Mental Development	Young teens have strong beliefs. They want to be heard. They can state their thoughts more clearly. They still think more about the present than the future. They are able to sit and listen for longer amounts of time. Talents in art and music may blossom.	Teens may pay more attention to school and grades. They are becoming self-reliant. They are more responsible. Being treated fairly is important to them. They can think about things that can't be seen such as spiritual ideas and things like love, respect and justice.	Older teens are able to think ideas through. They are concerned about future education and career goals. Their work habits are being set. They want to know where they fit in their family and other groups. They are able to see both sides of an issue.
Emotional Development	They are very self-centered. Because of the many changes in their bodies, they may have mood swings. The sweet little girl and the friendly little boy seem to vanish.	They need love and respect of parents and friends, but they may pretend not to care. They have a clearer idea of right and wrong. They sometimes behave like children when they are under stress.	They can have deep feelings of love and passion; they have a better sense of who they are sexually; they are better able to wait for results. They can work through conflicts with others and have more stable emotions.
Social Development	They want to be like their friends, to be normal. They fear being different. They enjoy being with friends, and they like one-on-one time with adults. They begin to doubt their parents' beliefs. Girls begin to like boys.	They need rules and structure for security, but rebel against rules. They may stop hugging and kissing parents, especially in public. Friendships change often. They may try alcohol, drugs, and/or tobacco.	Friends are important but there is room for other relationships; conflict with parents begins to decrease; concern for others increases. They are more independent. They enjoy some family and community traditions.

How Parents Can Help

- ☺ Give your teens the facts about sex. If you feel uneasy talking with your teen about sex, get books or leaflets from the library, health department, school nurse, or other trusted source. Read it with your teen. The Extension Service in your county may offer the programs “Girl Talk” for parents and their 10- to 12-year-old daughters or “Straight Talk for Boys” for parents and their 10- to 12-year-old sons. These programs help parents and children talk about sex.
- ☺ Give your teens the facts about tobacco, alcohol, and drug use. Get booklets from your health department, the school nurse, the DARE officer in the police or sheriff’s department, or local groups that help children resist drugs.
- ☺ Share your beliefs about sex, alcohol, and drug use with your teens. Tell them why you have those beliefs. Even though they may not agree with you, teens need to know your thoughts about these subjects.
- ☺ Tell your teens often that you love them. They may act like they don’t care, but they need to know that you love them even when they do not obey you. Tell them you may not like what they do, but you still love them.
- ☺ Build your teen’s confidence by noticing the things they do well. Teens are finding their talents. They may do well in school, sports, music, art, computers, or be good at fixing things. Find something your teen does well. Encourage him or her to work on that talent. This is very important for teens who don’t think they do anything well. Try to find something they can do. They may be good at making friends, helping around the house, or working with animals. Point out their strengths.
- ☺ Listen to your teens when they talk to you. Teens have very strong feelings. If parents say things like “You’ll grow out of it” or “You’ll get over it,” teens may feel like parents don’t care. This will stop teens from talking with their parents. Instead, say things like, “It hurts to be dumped” or “I’ll bet that made you feel bad.” This tells teens that you understand how they feel. Let them do most of the talking.
- ☺ Pick your battles. Teens want to be like their friends and unlike their parents. They may rebel against their parents in many ways, such as their dress, the music they listen to, their hair styles, or the things they do. If teens are given some choices in things that are less risky, such as how they dress and how they wear their hair, they are less likely to choose to do more risky things like using drugs or alcohol or joining a gang.
- ☺ Get to know the friends of your teens. Keep track of what your teens are doing, where they are going, and who they are with. If teens start to hang out with a new set of friends, especially friends who make you feel uneasy, talk to your teen about hwy they have these friends. Talk to the teachers at school, the guidance counselor, a minister, or the Families First Family Services Counselor about your concerns. Ask if they will talk to your teen. Sometimes teens will talk to other adults before they will talk with their parents.

Pets: Keep small children away from pets that scratch and bite. Even the most gentle pets may hurt your child if angry or frightened.

Plastic Wrap and Bags: Keep plastic wrap and bags away from your child. They might smother your child.

Sharp Bolts, Nails and Screws: Check your furniture for sharp bolts, nails and screws. Replace or tape over any sharp points.

Small Rugs: Remove small throw rugs that can cause your child to slip or trip and fall.

Window Blinds: Keep window blinds pulled up high and strings tied high to keep your child from being strangled.

Wood Splinters: Sand rough and splintered edges on wooden furniture and other materials.

For more information on how to keep your child safe, call your local UT Extension office.

Home Safety Checklist

- Remove pillows and blankets from the baby crib
- Check the temperature of the water heater
- Remove soft toys in the baby crib
- Check baby crib to see that bars or slats are less than 2½ inches apart
- Make sure the crib mattress is low enough that the baby cannot climb out
- Repair or throw away broken toys or toys with loose parts
- Move cords from lamps, appliances and other objects out of “child” reach
- Move curtain chains or strings out of child’s reach
- Store chemicals and cleaners in locked cabinet or out of child’s reach
- Move crib mobiles and gums out of child’s reach
- Put outlet cover on all unused electrical outlets
- Move glass and breakable objects out of child’s reach
- Check the temperature of the heater to make sure it is not too hot
- Make sure hot objects such as hot plates, irons, matches, candles, hot pans or dishes are out of child’s reach
- Store medicines and vitamins out of child’s reach or in locked cabinet
- Remove loose and chipped paint
- Keep children away from pets that scratch or bite
- Store plastic wrap or bags out of child’s reach
- Check furniture for sharp bolts, nails and screws and correct them, if found
- Store sharp objects, such as knives and scissors out of child’s reach
- Remove small rugs that slip and slide
- Sand rough edges or splinters on wooden furniture or other objects

My Impressions of My Child

Child's Age _____
Child's Sex: _____ Boy _____ Girl

Check the words or phrases that best describe your child.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Bored | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet | <input type="checkbox"/> Rude | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Busy | <input type="checkbox"/> Selfish | <input type="checkbox"/> Stubborn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Polite | <input type="checkbox"/> Neat | <input type="checkbox"/> Funny |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Generous | <input type="checkbox"/> Is a follower | <input type="checkbox"/> Loving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Messy | <input type="checkbox"/> Rebellious | <input type="checkbox"/> Likes to sing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is a leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Talks back | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obedient | <input type="checkbox"/> Likes to watch TV | <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful | <input type="checkbox"/> Easily angered | <input type="checkbox"/> Lazy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Likes to read | <input type="checkbox"/> Has problems making friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Careless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Even tempered | <input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty with school | <input type="checkbox"/> Clumsy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gets along well with others | <input type="checkbox"/> Brave | <input type="checkbox"/> Calm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does well in school | <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Demanding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> Careful | <input type="checkbox"/> Gives up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loud | <input type="checkbox"/> Graceful | <input type="checkbox"/> Serious |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |

Write one or more things that your child enjoys.