

FACT SHEET

Understanding Children's Developmental Milestones



Understanding child development is fundamental to quality early childhood education and care. One of the key tools for supporting children's growth is knowledge of developmental milestones. These show the typical abilities and behaviours that most children achieve at certain ages.

What Are Developmental Milestones?

Developmental milestones are specific skills or behaviours that most children reach by a particular age. These milestones span across four main areas of development:



- **Physical (Gross & Fine Motor) Skills:** Sitting, crawling, walking, drawing, grasping.



- **Cognitive Skills:** Learning, thinking, exploring, and problem-solving.



- **Language and Communication Skills:** Making sounds, understanding speech, using words and sentences.



- **Social and Emotional Skills:** Playing with others, showing emotions, developing self-awareness.

Milestones help educators and families monitor whether a child's development is on track. While each child is unique and develops at their own pace, developmental milestones offer a useful framework for observation and support.

Why Milestones Matter in Early Childhood Education and Care:

Understanding developmental milestones is essential because it enables educators and families to:

- **Monitor Individual Development:** Identify children who are progressing typically and those who may need extra support.
- **Plan Appropriate Learning Opportunities:** Design activities that align with children's developmental stages.
- **Strengthen Observation and Documentation:** Record meaningful observations that inform planning and assessments.
- **Support Family Engagement:** Share information and collaborate with families regarding their child's progress.
- **Promote Inclusive Practice:** Modify environments and interactions to meet a range of developmental needs.

For example:

- *A 2-year-old typically starts to form simple phrases. If a child is not yet using words, further support or assessment may be needed.*
- *A 4-year-old usually begins to show cooperative play. If this is not observed, it might be helpful to support social-emotional development through group activities.*



Supporting Every Child's Development Through Informed Practice:

Early childhood professionals play a vital role in shaping the learning and wellbeing of young children. A sound understanding of developmental milestones helps ensure that each child receives the support, encouragement, and challenge they need to thrive.

Milestones are not fixed rules—they are general indicators. Every child is unique and will reach milestones in their own time. If you have concerns about a child's development, consider seeking advice from a child health nurse, speech therapist, occupational therapist, or paediatrician. Early support can make a big difference.

With thoughtful observation, informed practice, and responsive care, educators and carers can make a meaningful difference in each child's developmental journey.

Example guide:

This guide outlines typical developmental milestones for children from birth to 6 years old. It is designed to support educators and families in observing and supporting children's growth. Please remember that each child develops at their own pace. This chart can be used to help identify strengths, inform planning, and support conversations about development.

Further information can be found at:

[DevelopmentalMilestonesEYLFandNQS.pdf](#)

Age Range	Category	Developmental Milestones
 0-12 Months	Physical	Lifts head, moves arms and legs, follows objects with eyes - Rolls over, sits with support, begins crawling - Pulls to stand, may take first steps, uses pincer grasp
	Cognitive	Explores with hands and mouth - Understands cause and effect - Looks for hidden objects (object permanence)
	Social/Emotional	Smiles at people, enjoys peek-a-boo - Shows stranger anxiety
	Language & Communication	Coos, babbles ('ba-ba', 'da-da') - Responds to name, understands simple words like 'no'
 1-2 Years	Physical	Walks alone, climbs stairs with help - Begins running, feeds self with spoon
	Cognitive	Finds hidden things easily - Sorts shapes and colors, follows simple directions
	Social/Emotional	Has temper tantrums, imitates others - Shows fear in some situations
	Language & Communication	Says several single words by 18 months - Uses simple two-word phrases by 2 years
 3-4 Years	Physical	Climbs well, runs easily, pedals tricycle - Uses scissors
	Cognitive	Works toys with buttons/levers - Plays make-believe, understands basic counting and time
	Social/Emotional	Cooperates with other children - Shows affection, separates easily from parents
	Language & Communication	Speaks in 4-5-word sentences - Tells stories, follows multi-step instructions
 5-6 Years	Physical	Hops, skips, ties shoelaces - Good balance and coordination
	Cognitive	Understands time and money - Counts to 10 or more, knows everyday items
	Social/Emotional	Wants to please friends and teachers - Understands rules, enjoys singing/dancing/acting
	Language & Communication	Speaks clearly, uses full name and address - Uses future tense

Links to the National Quality Standards:

Standard 1.1 – Program

Element 1.1.1 – Approved Learning Framework

Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.

Element 1.1.2 – Child-Centred

Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.

Standard 1.2 – Practice

Element 1.2.1 – Intentional Teaching

Educators are deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful in their decisions and actions.

Standard 1.3 – Assessment and Planning

Element 1.3.1 – Assessment and Planning Cycle

Each child's learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection.

Standard 5.1 – Relationships between educators and children

Element 5.1.1 – Positive Educator to Child Interactions

Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.

Standard 6.1 – Supportive Relationships with Families

Element 6.1.2 – Parent Views Are Respected

The expertise, culture, values and beliefs of families are respected and families share in decision-making about their child's learning and wellbeing.

Standard 6.2 – Collaborative Partnerships

Element 6.2.1 – Transitions

Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing information and clarifying responsibilities.