

Developmental Milestones: Birth to 12 Months



You and Your Foster Child

Infants go through many changes during their first 12 months, and no two infants develop at the same pace. One infant may reach a milestone early, another later. Infants born prematurely tend to reach milestones a little later. It is also not unusual for infants to regress in one skill or another from time to time. Many infants, for example, develop sleep problems when their teeth begin to come in.

Use these milestones as a general guide. What matters most is that your infant progresses from one stage to another at a fairly steady pace. Reaching a milestone earlier or later generally does not indicate whether an infant will be advanced or delayed later in life.

Milestones during an infant's first 12 months

The following is a general guide to some basic milestones for physical, cognitive, language, and social and emotional development from birth to 12 months.

Newborn to 1 month

Physical development milestones:

- Infants develop basic reflexes needed to survive, such as sucking, swallowing, coughing, gagging, elimination, grasping, blinking, and startling.
- Infants keep their hands clenched in fists most of the time.
- Their eyes are not coordinated and may appear to cross.
- They cannot organize their hands and eyes to work together.

Cognitive development milestones:

- Infants will watch an object about 12–15 inches away, especially if it is moving slowly from one side of their field of vision to the other.

- Infants investigate their own hands and fingers.
- Infants show a preference for their mother's voice.
- They can distinguish smells and taste. They may prefer sweet-tasting liquids and will recoil from unpleasant smells.

Language development milestones:

- Infants communicate mostly by crying but sometimes by making other noises.
- They develop preferences for certain sounds. For example, they may settle or become still when they hear music or familiar voices.
- They will turn in the direction of a familiar voice.

Social and emotional development milestones:

- Infants will sleep, on average, between 17 and 19 hours a day. But they do it in a series of short sleeping periods.
- They enjoy being held and rocked.

- They show early characteristics of individual personality.
- They begin to recognize their primary caregivers.

1–4 months

Physical development milestones:

- Infants, when face down, should be able to lift their head and chest and look both ways.
- Infants begin to keep their hands open.
- They focus their eyes and track a moving object or caregiver.
- They wrap their fingers around an object when it is placed in their hand.
- They move their arms and legs in a squirming fashion and kick their legs out.

Cognitive development milestones:

- Infants move their heads toward different colors and changes in lighting.
- They are attracted to people's voices.
- They begin to investigate their environment by putting things into their mouths.
- They reach toward the sound of toys that make noise.

Language development milestones:

- Infants make cooing and gurgling noises, especially when a caregiver talks to or smiles at them.
- They cry when they need something.
- They laugh, sometimes loudly.
- They can associate sounds with certain objects and bodily activity.

Social and emotional milestones:

- Infants respond with a smile when someone smiles at them.
- They can play games, such as peek-a-boo, with their caregiver.
- They enjoy being gently tickled and jiggled.
- A familiar voice can soothe them when they are upset.

4–8 months

Physical development milestones:

- Their first teeth may come in, causing gum swelling and irritation.
- They begin to purposely reach for things by coordinating their hands and eyes.
- They can support a bottle on their own during a feeding.
- With a little help, they can hold a sitting pose. They also can bounce up and down if you help hold them in a standing position.
- They can turn over on their own when on a flat surface.
- They may scoot backwards while on their stomach before they can crawl forward.

Cognitive development milestones:

- Infants anticipate being fed and may open their mouths when food is in sight.
- They start to copy the expressions or movements of caregivers, such as waving.
- They will focus on an object and reach for it.
- They begin to search for things that have been dropped or are no longer there.
- They may be able to focus on only one toy at a time.

Language development milestones:

- Infants babble in a rhythmic fashion.
- Infants will recognize their own name.
- Infants can perform simple, one-word requests, such as “wave” and “eat.”
- They imitate sounds not related to speech, such as lip smacking and tongue clicking.
- They repeat the same sounds over and over.

Social and emotional milestones:

- Infants have a strong attachment to, and preference for, their primary caregivers.
- They recognize their regular caregivers, family, and their reflections in the mirror.
- They understand that they are separate from their caregivers.
- They may start to show stranger anxiety around unknown adults.
- They respond negatively if a toy is taken from them.

8–12 months

Physical development milestones:

- They manage to drink from a cup with a little help.
- They begin to use only one hand to reach for things.
- They are able to eat cereal, raisins, and other finger foods by themselves.
- They can sit up by themselves.
- They can crawl on stairs and flat surfaces.
- They can walk while being supported by someone else.

Cognitive development milestones:

- Infants imitate the movements of their caregivers.
- They show that they can see things far away by pointing at them.
- They are able to respond to simple instructions.
- They will drop a toy when offered a different one.
- They start to understand how to use common objects, such as a comb to comb hair or a spoon to put food in their mouth.

Language development milestones:

- Infants will imitate spoken words or sounds made by their caregivers.
- They speak their first words.
- They can show they agree or disagree by nodding or shaking their heads.
- Infants are aware of their caregiver's name and react when it is called.
- Infants begin to interact verbally with their caregivers.

Social and emotional development milestones:

- Infants will try to keep their primary caregiver in sight.
- Infants become attached to a favorite toy or blanket.
- They begin to show assertiveness by pushing away a caregiver or by shouting.
- They may show separation anxiety, such as crying when a caregiver leaves.
- They may share belongings with other infants.
- They understand what the word “no” means.

When to seek professional help

Remember that these milestones are a general guide. Some infants will reach them early, some later, and not all infants will show all of the behaviors on the lists. However, you should consult your child's pediatrician or other health care professional if you observe:

- Your infant does not achieve a majority of the milestones within a reasonable period of time after the end of a stage.
- Your infant suddenly stops making consistent progress over several weeks.

Pediatricians and other health care professionals can diagnose developmental delays that might be involved and suggest the appropriate steps to take. It is important to intervene early to improve the outcomes of infants who do have developmental delays.



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