

The first year with baby is filled with wonder

From the day they are sent home from the hospital, new parents are filled with questions about their baby. When left unanswered, these questions can quickly turn into worries: *Are they healthy? Are they on track? Am I doing enough? Too much? Am I even doing it right?*

Thankfully, there are some great resources that parents can use to help gauge whether children are progressing on schedule, and to intervene early if there are delays.



Jane Squires, Ph.D., is an expert in early childhood development and early identification of delays. She stresses the importance of involving parents in the monitoring of young children's development. After all, who knows the child better than the parents? Squires is also lead author of the ***Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition (ASQ®-3)***. Below, Squires shares some information about what skills to watch for as your baby grows, and provides activity ideas to support your baby's development along the way.

Skills to watch for

What sorts of developmental milestones should parents notice, when it comes to typically developing infants during the first year? **The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)** gives us a breakdown on some noteworthy behaviors for most babies.

At 2 months: calms down when spoken to or picked up; looks at your face; smiles when you talk or smile to them; makes sounds other than crying; reacts to loud sounds; watches you as you move; looks at a toy for several seconds; holds head up when on tummy; moves both arms and both legs; opens hands briefly.

At 4 months: chuckles (not yet a full laugh) when you try to make them laugh; looks at you, moves, or makes sounds to get or keep your attention; makes sounds back when you talk; turns head towards the sound of your voice; looks at hands with interest; holds head steady without support when being held; brings hands to mouth; pushes up onto elbows/forearms when on tummy.

At 6 months: knows familiar people; likes to look at self in mirror; laughs; takes turns making sounds with you; makes squealing noises; puts things in their mouth to explore them; reaches to grab a toy they want; closes lips to show they don't want more food; rolls from tummy to back; pushes up with straight arms when on tummy; leans on hands to support themselves when sitting.

At 1 year: waves "bye-bye"; calls a parent "mama" or "dada" or another special name; understands "no" (pauses briefly or stops when you say it); puts something in a container, like a block in a cup; looks for things they see you hide, like a toy under a blanket; pulls up to stand; walks, holding on to furniture; drinks from a cup without a lid, as you hold it; picks things up between thumb and pointer finger, like small bits of food.

In the event that delays are suspected, don't panic! Early intervention is key. Identifying possible delays early gets you on the path to getting the supports in place to help your child achieve better outcomes. Discuss your child's development and any concerns with your pediatrician or child care provider. They'll have lots of advice, as well as referral options for you to pursue additional resources if needed. You can also do some homework online. There are some great websites referenced at the end of this article and on the agesandstagesresearch.com webpage under Parent Resources.

Supporting Your Infant's Development

What to expect and how you can promote growth

How parents can help

Quality parent–child interaction makes a tremendous difference in supporting healthy development. Get down on the floor and play! Read to them. Cuddle. Make things together. Go places. Explore and identify new things. Narrate the trip through the grocery store aisles. Talk and sing. Make it a priority to be present and engaging. “It’s the most important thing that parents can do for their children,” says Squires.



Squires suggests some simple activities parents can try with their children:

Babies 1–4 months of age:

- Sing baby simple songs with repeated phrases. The repetition helps baby learn and listen.
- While baby lays on their back, hold a brightly colored toy above their head in line of vision, and move it slowly back and forth to see if their gaze follows the toy.
- On a nice day, take baby outside on a nature walk, talking about the things you see. Baby will enjoy the sound of your voice and the stimulation of being outdoors and seeing new sights.
- Sit baby on your lap and gently shake a rattle on one side and then the other.

Babies 4–8 months of age:

- Give baby a spoon to grasp, hold, chew, bang on something, or drop.
- Place an unbreakable mirror near baby for visual stimulation. Do they understand their reflection? Look in the mirror together and wave.
- Place baby on tummy with favorite objects close but just far enough away to encourage reach and movement.
- With baby facing you, change facial expressions (big smile, sticking out tongue, raising eyebrows, etc.). Give baby a turn to make faces and mimic what they do.

Babies 8–12 months of age:

- Make a simple puzzle for baby by putting ping pong balls into a muffin pan or egg carton. Or, cut a round hole in the lid of a coffee can and let baby drop wooden clothespins or ping pong balls inside.
- Play ball games. Roll a beach ball or nerf ball to baby and have a partner help them roll (or throw) it back to you.
- Let baby make choices by offering two toys or foods and see which they pick. Encourage them to point or reach to show preference and express their likes or dislikes.
- Say “Hi” or “Bye” and wave when entering or leaving a room, encouraging baby to imitate these early gestures.

Babies 12–16 months of age:

- Tape a large piece of drawing paper to a table and show baby how to scribble with large crayons or paint with water.
- When baby is learning to walk and holding on to furniture in room, arrange furniture with small spaces in between to encourage baby to step across the gaps using balance.
- Show baby how everything has a name. Help them learn by repeatedly naming common objects, body parts, people, etc.
- Let baby help you clean up! Play “feed the waste basket” or “give this to Mommy or Daddy.”

Additional Resources for Parents:

Ages & Stages Questionnaires

www.agesandstages.com

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/baby

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/toddlers.html

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/concerned.html

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations

challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu

National Parent Helpline

www.nationalparenthelpline.org

Parenting Counts

www.parentingcounts.org/information/timeline

Vroom

www.vroom.org

ZERO TO THREE

www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/parent-favorites

www.bpub.fyi/Lets-Play-App