

Aspects of Holistic Child Development

It is important to keep in mind that even a tiny baby is a person. 'Holistic development' sees the child in the round, as a whole person – physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, morally, culturally and spiritually.

Learning about child development involves studying patterns of growth and development, from which guidelines for 'normal' development are drawn up.

Developmental norms are sometimes called milestones – they describe the recognised pattern of development that children are expected to follow. Each child will develop in a unique way, however: using norms helps in understanding these general patterns of development whilst recognising the wide variation between individuals.

The areas of development one could look at are:

1) Physical development, including sensory development

Physical development is the way in which the body increases in skill and becomes more complex in its performance. Physical development also includes sensory development. Sensation is the process by which we receive information through the senses.

2) Cognitive and language development

Cognitive or intellectual development is development of the mind – the part of the brain that is used for recognising, reasoning, knowing and understanding.

Perception involves people making sense of what they see, hear, touch, smell and taste. Perception is affected by previous experience and knowledge, and by the person's emotional state at the time.

Language development is the development of communication skills, including skills in receptive speech – what a person understands; expressive speech – the words the person produces; articulation – the person's actual pronunciation of words.

3) Emotional and social development

Emotional development involves the development of feelings, such as awareness of oneself; development of feelings towards other people and the development of self-esteem and a self-concept.

4) Moral and spiritual development

Moral and spiritual development consists in a developing awareness of how to relate to other ethically, morally and humanely. It involves understanding values such as honesty and respect, and acquiring concepts such as right and wrong, and responsibility for the consequences of one's actions.

The Pattern of Development

Children's development follows a pattern:

From simple to complex –Development progresses from simple actions to more complex ones. For example, children stand before they can walk, and walk before they can skip or hop.

From head to toe –Development progresses downwards. Physical control and co-ordination begins with a child's head and develops down the body through the arms, the hands and back, and finally to the legs and feet.

From inner to outer –Development progresses from actions nearer the body to more complex ones further from the body. For example, children can co-ordinate their arms, using gross motor skills to reach for an object, before they have learned the fine motor skills necessary to use their fingers to pick it up.

From general to specific –Development progresses from general responses to specific ones. For example, a young baby shows pleasure by a massive general response – the eyes widen, and the legs and arms move vigorously – whereas an older child shows pleasure by smiling or using appropriate words or gestures.

The various aspects of development are intricately linked: each affects and is affected by the others. For example, once children have reached the stage of emotional development at which they feel secure when apart from their main carer, they will have access to a much wider range of relationships, experiences and opportunities for learning. Similarly, when children can use language effectively, they will have more opportunities for social interaction. If one aspect is hampered or neglected in some way, children will be challenged in reaching their full potential.

Development at 4 Years

There are patterns of growth and development patterns for babies from birth to their first month and even up to age 7. Here is an example of the normative development pattern of a child at 4 years of age.

At 4 years of age, children are quite capable and independent.

They walk with swinging steps, almost like an adult's, and like to hop and jump.

They are fascinated by cause and effect, and their increasing mastery of language prompts them to ask questions about the way things work in the world.

Physical development

Gross motor skills

Children:

- have developed a good sense of balance and may be able to walk along a line
- can stand, walk and run on tiptoe
- can catch, kick, throw and bounce a ball
- bend at the waist to pick up objects from the floor
- enjoy climbing trees and on frames
- run up and down stairs, one foot per step
- can ride a tricycle with skill and make sharp turns easily.

Fine motor skills

Children:

- can build a tower of ten or more cubes
- can copy a building pattern of three steps using six cubes or more
- are able to thread small beads on a lace
- hold and use a pencil in adult fashion
- can draw on request a figure that resembles a person, showing head, legs and body
- can copy the letters 'X', 'V', 'H', 'T' and 'O'
- can spread their hand, and can bring their thumbs into opposition with each finger in turn.

Sensory development

Children:

- match and name four primary colours
- listen to long stories with attention.

Cognitive and language development

Children:

- enjoy counting up to twenty by rote, and understand the concept of number up to three
- talk about things in the past and the future
- can sort objects into groups
- have increased memory skills – for example, they can remember a particular event, such as when their grandparents visited several months previously
- can give reasons and solve problems
- include more detail in their drawings, such as adding hands and fingers to drawings of people

- often confuse fact with fiction
- talk fluently, asking questions ('Why..?', 'When..?', 'How..?') and understanding the answers
- can repeat nursery rhymes and songs, with very few errors
- can state their full name and address almost correctly
- tell long stories, sometimes confusing fact and fantasy
- enjoy jokes and plays on words
- may begin to recognise patterns in the way words are formed and apply these consistently, unaware that many common words have irregular forms – for example, as the past tense is often made by adding '-ed' ('I walk' becomes 'I walked'), children may say 'I runned' or 'I goed' instead of 'I ran' or 'I went'.

Emotional and social development

Children:

- can eat skillfully with a spoon and a fork
- can wash and dry their hands, and brush their teeth
- can undress and dress themselves, except for laces, ties and back buttons
- often show sensitivity to others
- show a sense of humour, both in talk and in activities
- like to be independent and are strongly self-willed
- like to be with other children.

Moral and spiritual development

Children:

- understand the needs of others and the need to share and take turns
- try to work out what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in behaviour.

The development of play

Children:

- act out puppet shows and scenes they have seen on television
- play elaborate role-play games with others
- enjoy imaginative play, which helps them to cope with strong emotions.

Promoting development

- Provide children with plenty of opportunities for exercise.

- Play party games such as musical statues, to foster the ideas of winning, losing, and co-operation.
- Encourage children to use rope swings and climbing frames.
- Encourage play with small construction toys, jigsaw puzzles and board games.
- Provide art and craft materials for painting, printing, and gluing and sticking activities.
- Encourage sand and water play, and play with dough or modeling clay.
- Talk often with children. Repeat favourite stories and encourage them to express themselves.
- Visit the library and read books together.
- Look for books and puzzles that help children to categorise and sort objects.
- Play lotto and other matching games such as pairs.
- Display children's paintings around the house – this gives them a feeling of pride in their work.
- Teach children how to dress and undress themselves in preparation for school games lessons.
- Encourage independence when going to the toilet.
- Let children practise using a computer mouse and carrying out simple computer activities.
- Organise visits to parks and farms. Encourage children to draw what they have seen.
- Involve children in caring for pets to encourage a sense of responsibility.
- Provide a box of dressing-up clothes for imaginative play.
- Let children organise their own games with friends, to encourage independence and confidence.
- Try not to rush to help when children are finding an activity difficult – allow them time to master new skills, offering praise and encouragement.

Safety points

- Teach children never to play with sticks or other sharp objects, or to run with a pencil or lolly stick in their mouth.
- Educate children about road safety by setting a good example.

Activities

Making a book

Helping children to make a book of their own is a good way of encouraging a liking for books.

One idea is to make a book about the child and about the people and things that mean a lot to her or him. This could include drawings or photographs of :

- family and friends
- toys and favourite things
- birthdays and holidays
- pets and other animals
- favourite foods and games.

The book neednot be elaborate; the main idea is to involve the child in the making of it and thereby increase her or his self-esteem. You could buy a scrapbook or a largenotebook, or just fold some large sheets of paper in half, punch holes along the fold, and thread some ribbon or cord through them.

Planting seeds

Children will enjoy growing their own plants and discovering how to care for them.

1. Collect some empty eggshells. Give each child a shell and ask them to draw a face on their own shell.
2. Cut a cardboard egg carton into individual pockets. Place one eggshell in each pocket.
3. Pack each shell generously with cotton wool and soak this with water before putting the seeds on top.
4. Water the cotton wool regularly and wait for the 'green hair' to sprout. (This should only take two to three days.)



This article is an excerpt from the book
Child Development : An Illustrated Guide
By Carolyn Meggitt & Gerald Sunderland
ISBN: 0435-42056-9

The book discusses development patterns of children from birth to the age of eight years. The book also describes development patterns of children with special needs, i.e. children whose development differs from the norm.