



Your early learning guide For Children 0 to 8 Months



Read this guide to help your
child grow and learn!

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0 - 8 months

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Your early learning guide For Children 0 to 8 months



These guidelines are for YOU and YOUR BABY!

You are your child's most important teacher and caregiver, and this guide can help you to notice and understand important signs your baby is growing and learning in ways we know will give him or her the best chance in life to be happy, successful, and healthy. The first years of your child's life are more important than most people know. Did you know that 80% of our brain growth happens by age 3? This means that how parents and caregivers nurture brain development in young children matters, and it matters a lot! What you do now with your child will impact the rest of your child's life.

This guide helps parents understand how to support healthy growth and learning through responsive caregiving. Responsive caregiving means that parents pay attention to their children, notice signs of need and development, and respond to those signals in loving, supportive ways. This guide gives you common examples of how young children show

us their needs and their developmental progress, while providing you with examples of how you can respond to those needs in a loving and supportive way.

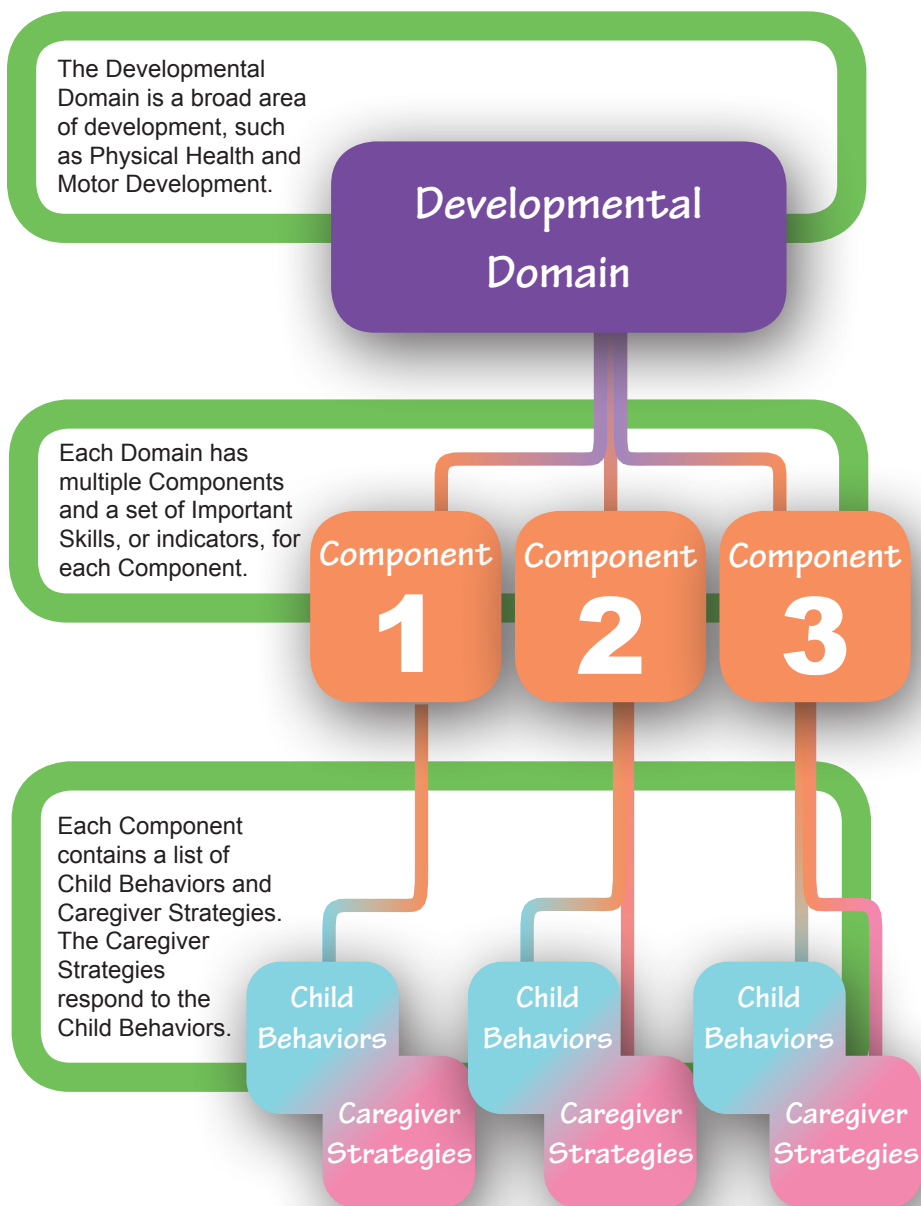
On the following pages, information is organized by *domains*, or categories of development:

- Physical Health and Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Communication Development
- Cognitive Development

The *domains* are broken into more focused areas called *components*. Each *component* has specific *child behaviors* alongside *strategies* you can take as a parent to be responsive and encourage the healthy development of your child!



How information in this early learning guide is organized





Physical Health and Motor Development

Physical development relates to children's physical growth, while motor development refers to movements of large muscles (gross motor) and small muscles (fine motor). Young children's physical and motor development affects their cognitive and social development, readiness for school, and adult health. Therefore, good physical health and motor development is necessary for overall development.

The Physical Health and Motor Development domain is broken into three important component areas:

- health and well-being
- gross motor skills
- fine motor skills

Providing a safe environment, free time to experiment with materials and body movements, and planning daily activities that encourage your children to move their growing bodies and make healthy food choices all support young children's physical development and well-being.

Health and Well-Being

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows signs of healthy development
2. Responds when physical needs are met
3. Expresses physical needs nonverbally or verbally
4. Participates in physical care routines
5. Begins to develop self-care skills
6. Begins to understand safe and unsafe behaviors

Infants might

- Gaze at object, person, or toy
- Turn towards sounds and noises
- Cry when hungry and quiet down when picked up for breastfeeding or when they see caregiver with bottle
- Begin to calm during bathtime
- Babble or coo with caregivers during diaper-changing time

As a caregiver, you can

- Bring attention to a mobile or picture, or show infants things they can follow with their eyes
- Respond quickly when infants are hungry by feeding, holding, and cuddling them
- Provide infants with both calming and stimulating experiences
- Listen and respond to the different types of cries, sounds, facial expressions, and infants' body language
- Respond promptly when infants have a wet or soiled diaper
- Provide infants with healthy and nutritious foods (breast milk or formula, soft or pureed fruits and vegetables)
- Talk with infants about what is happening when bathing, diapering, and dressing ("Now I am washing your arms.")
- Follow infants' feeding signals (turns head or pushes away food when full; reaches out or cries when hungry)

Gross Motor Skills

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Moves body, arms, and legs with increasing coordination
2. Demonstrates increasing balance, stability, control, and coordination
3. Develops increasing ability to change positions and move body from place to place
4. Moves body to achieve a goal

Infants might

- Turn head from side to side and shake or wiggle arms and legs
- Lift head and shoulders
- Roll or try to move towards a toy
- Scoot forward or backwards
- Begin to sit with support
- Bat at or kick at toys or things hanging over them

As a caregiver, you can

- Get infants' attention by calling their names or offering a favorite toy
- Give infants frequent "tummy time" while staying close to them, and notice when infants begin to lift their head and shoulders
- Place toys within and just beyond the reach of infants, encouraging them to reach for toys
- Hold infants in your lap and provide plenty of time for them to sit up; watch to see if they notice the world around them
- Provide toys that make sounds

infants bat at
things hanging
over them



Fine Motor Skills

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Uses hands or feet to touch objects or people
2. Develops small muscle control and coordination
3. Coordinates eye and hand movements
4. Uses tools and different actions on objects

Infants might

- Look at and follow faces and objects with their eyes
- Bat or kick at objects or toys
- Begin to grab at things with a purpose but may not hold things well yet
- Point to something they find interesting
- Look at objects while bringing them to their mouth

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide areas with plenty of space for infants to move their legs and arms freely
- Place interesting toys and objects within reach for infants to look at, bat, kick, or grab
- Provide infants with a variety of small toys
- Allow infants to grab and hold your finger while playing
- Play active games, such as “patty cake,” “peek-a-boo,” and fingerplays
- Notice how infants react when they touch and mouth different textures

infants point to things they are interested in



Social and Emotional Development

The Social and Emotional Development domain includes many skills that form the foundation children need to become happy and successful adults. The Social and Emotional Development domain includes four components:

- Trust and Emotional Security (Attachment)
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Relationships with Others

Children's brains are especially sensitive to caregiving experiences – those who receive warm, consistent, responsive care develop a sense of emotional security and confidence that allows them to be open to exploring their world, trying new activities, and forming relationships.

In contrast, young children who receive harsh or chronically unresponsive care become insecure and anxious. Thus, caregivers of young children have an especially important role in modeling warm, caring behaviors, fostering healthy attachment relationships, helping children cope with emotions, regulate their behaviors, and promoting children's prosocial behaviors toward others.

Trust and Emotional Security

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Establishes secure relationships with primary caregivers
2. Differentiates between familiar and unfamiliar adults
3. Shows emotional connections and attachment to others while beginning to show independence

Infants might

- Show interest in familiar faces by staring at them
- Imitate familiar adults' body language and sounds
- Respond with smiles and cooing when picked up by a familiar caregiver
- Follow movement of caregiver around the room with their eyes
- Prefer sight, smell, and sound of primary caregiver
- Show social interaction with a smile and mutual eye gaze
- Stop crying and calm down when comforted by a familiar caregiver

As a caregiver, you can

- Hold, cuddle, hug, smile, and laugh with infants
- Hold infants during bottle feeding times, and talk with them in a calm and soothing tone
- Listen to and sing with infants often, especially during daily routines, such as feeding and diaper changes
- Notice, understand, and follow the signals of infants, such as cries for hunger or pain, turning away when full, or when ready to stop interacting
- Display courteousness, warmth, and sensitivity when interacting with adults and children

Self-Awareness

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Expresses needs and wants through facial expressions, sounds, or gestures
2. Develops awareness of self as separate from others
3. Shows confidence in increasing abilities
4. Shows awareness of relationship to family/ community/cultural group

Infants might

- Cry when hungry, uncomfortable, tired, or unhappy
- Turn head, frown, and/or arch back when over-stimulated
- Begin to express several clearly different emotions, such as happiness, excitement, and anger
- Turn and look at caregiver when their name is called
- Look at and/or smile at themselves in the mirror
- Explore own hands and feet
- Push away bottle, breast, or food, or turn head away when full

As a caregiver, you can

- Respond promptly and regularly to infants' needs or signs of stress
- Recognize infants' signs of over-stimulation and respond with calmer interaction or surroundings (use softer voice and move away from source of stimulation)
- Notice infants' emotions and facial expressions, and name the expressions when you see them
- Be aware of aspects in infants' surroundings that might cause distress, such as noise or light
- Use infants' names when speaking to them
- Give infants opportunities to see themselves in mirrors
- Help infants become aware of their body parts by naming them and massaging their hands, fingers, arms, legs, feet, toes, tummy, etc.
- Notice infants' signs that they are full and stop feeding them

Self-Regulation

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Begins to manage own behavior and demonstrates increasing control of emotion
2. Shows ability to cope with stress
3. Develops understanding of simple routines, rules or limitations

Infants might

- Turn their head, frown, and/or arch back when over-stimulated
- Seek and respond to comfort from familiar caregivers when frightened or upset
- Calm when held or gently rocked
- Start sleep/wake cycles
- Show some routine behaviors, such as babbling themselves to sleep and thumb-sucking

As a caregiver, you can

- Talk with infants about routines (what is happening and what will happen next)
- Respond quickly and routinely to infants' needs (comfort infants that are distressed)
- Recognize infants' signs of stress and respond with calmer interaction or surroundings (use softer voice, move away from source of stimulation)
- Allow infants a few minutes to calm themselves when trying to get to sleep
- Give infants calming materials (soft blanket or toy)
- Respect and support each infant's individual schedule

infants show some routine behaviors, such as thumb-sucking



Relationships with Others

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows interest in and awareness of others
2. Responds to and interacts with others
3. Begins to recognize and respond to the feelings and emotions of others and begins to show concern

Infants might

- Show interest in others by watching them and tracking their behaviors
- Cry, laugh, or smile with other infants

As a caregiver, you can

- Bring infants around other children and adults
- Comfort infants when they are distressed
- Encourage play between infants by talking about what they are doing and offering toys

infants show
interest in others
by watching them





Language and Communication Development

The Language and Communication Development domain includes three components describing how young children learn to:

- understand language
- speak to communicate with others
- develop early literacy skills needed for reading and writing

The development of language and communication skills begins long before children say their first word. Even very young infants are learning a great deal about their home language, or other languages in their environment, and caregivers can do many things to help support language development. Speaking to children about their daily routines, objects in their environments, their feelings, and sharing books with children are all important ways to support language development.

Listening and Understanding

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Listens with interest to language of others
2. Responds to nonverbal and verbal communication of others
3. Begins to understand the rules of conversation

Infants might

- Turn towards sounds or voice of caregiver
- Smile when spoken to
- Watch a person's face and body language when they are talking
- Respond to body language and directions given by the caregiver (hold their arms out when caregiver reaches for child and says "Let me pick you up.")
- Respond to different tones of voice, such as becoming excited or calm when spoken to
- Use hand motions and body movements (reaching, clapping, turning) in response to familiar words and phrases

As a caregiver, you can

- Notice when infants turn to your voice
- Talk to infants by describing caregiver's actions and infants' response ("I'm touching your toes now.")
- Talk back to infants in response to their sounds, verbalizations, and body language ("Are you waving at me? Hello, there.")
- Call infants by name or attract their interest with sounds that toys make
- Say the names of many objects in infants' surroundings ("That's a light.", "Let's get your blanket.", "Frances has her hat.")

Communication and Speaking

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Uses consistent sounds, gestures, or words to communicate for a variety of purposes
2. Imitates sounds, gestures, signs, or words
3. Uses language to engage in simple conversations

Infants might

- Make a variety of sounds to express needs and interests (laughing, cooing, sucking noises to indicate excitement, hunger, tired cry versus hurt cry, babbling)
- Begin to imitate sounds like “da” when caregiver says “da”
- Begin to move mouth while looking at caregiver talking
- Make sounds or signs to get caregiver’s attention

As a caregiver, you can

- Notice the variety of sounds infants make and how they imitate the sounds caregivers make
- Imitate infants’ sounds and body movements and allow time for infants to respond
- Notice the different ways infants attempt to communicate (such as facial expressions, verbal response, or body movements) with appropriate responses
- Talk to infants often while doing everyday activities (“Let’s get your arm into this shirt.”)
- Use many different voice tones to play and talk with infants
- Consistently name objects in the environment when infants show interest or a need for them

infants begin to
imitate sounds
caregivers make



Emergent Literacy

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows interest in songs, rhymes, and stories
2. Develops interest in and involvement with books and other print materials
3. Begins to recognize and understand symbols
4. Begins to develop interests and skills related to emergent writing

Infants might

- Focus attention, move body, or make sounds during familiar songs, fingerplays, or rhymes
- Touch, look at, or make sounds when looking at picture books with adult
- Look at others writing or drawing on paper

As a caregiver, you can

- Involve infants in fun songs and fingerplays (for example, “Itsy Bitsy Spider”)
- Read to infants and let them explore cloth books, texture books, and hard board books, including allowing them to mouth these types of books
- Hold and cuddle infants while reading to them
- Talk about and name the pictures in books as they look at a page
- Let infants watch you write and tell them what you’re doing (“Let’s write down that we need to get milk when we go to the grocery store.”)

infants touch, look at, or make sounds when looking at picture books



Cognitive Development

The Cognitive Development domain includes four components that describe how young children develop and demonstrate abilities in:

- exploring the world around them
- solving problems
- remembering and retaining information
- pretending and using their imagination

Cognitive development is often thought of as growth in children's thinking, reasoning, and understanding. Positive early experiences that support cognitive development contribute to lifelong traits such as curiosity and independence. When considering how to support cognitive development overall, remember that young children are very curious about their world! They learn through repetition and opportunities to freely explore their environment.

Exploration and Discovery

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Pays attention and exhibits curiosity in people and objects
2. Uses senses to explore people, objects, and the environment
3. Shows interest in colors, shapes, patterns, or pictures
4. Makes things happen and watches for results and repeats actions

Infants might

- Focus on caregivers' face and follow face or voice
- Turn head when a new person enters the room
- Reach out to touch objects
- Put objects in their mouth to touch and taste
- Reach out and grab new toys, and turn them over and over to explore or bang them
- Hit or kick toys to make them move over and over

As a caregiver, you can

- Stay close to and interact with infants
- Notice infants' reaction when new people enter the room
- Create surroundings without a lot of loud noises and distractions
- Place objects with different shapes, sizes, textures, and sounds within infants' reach (make sure the objects are safe to mouth)
- Name and describe objects infants are exploring and encourage them to continue to play with the objects by telling them you like their "music" or banging
- Give infants safe toys that produce interesting results or movements in response to their actions

infants put objects
in their mouths to
touch and taste



Problem Solving

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Experiments with different uses for objects
2. Shows imagination, creativity, and uses a variety of strategies to solve problems
3. Applies knowledge to new situations
4. Begins to develop interests and skills related to numbers and counting

Infants might

- Make sounds, cry, or fuss to get caregiver's attention
- Roll over to get a toy just out of reach
- Turn objects over to look at and handle them from different positions
- Begin to repeat actions to get an effect (drop a toy to hear it land or bang hands on table)

As a caregiver, you can

- Respond promptly and warmly to infants when they make sounds, cry, or fuss (change activity or the infant's position)
- Place enticing objects just out of infant's reach and encourage rolling or scooting to get them
- Offer toys that make a noise when shaken or dropped
- Patiently pick up objects that are repeatedly dropped by infants or redirect them to a new activity

Memory

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows ability to acquire and process new information
2. Recognizes familiar people, places, and things
3. Recalls and uses information in new situations
4. Searches for missing or hidden objects

Infants might

- Look intently at new faces or objects
- Smile in recognition of familiar caregiver and show excitement when they enter the room
- Look in appropriate direction for toys that have been dropped or partially covered by a blanket

As a caregiver, you can

- Engage in face-to-face play with infants (smiling, cooing, talking, singing, playing peek-a-boo)
- Greet infants by name, and talk about and name other people and objects in the room
- Celebrate when infants find a dropped toy, and play hiding games with infants by partially covering a toy and then revealing it

infants smile in
recognition of
familiar caregivers



Imitation and Make-Believe (Symbolic Play)

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Uses objects in new ways or in pretend play
2. Uses imitation in pretend play to express creativity and imagination

Infants might

- Copy caregiver actions, such as sticking out tongue or clapping hands together
- Imitate playing with a toy, such as shaking, banging, or pushing buttons to make a toy work
- Coo, squeal, or laugh when their caregiver talks and plays games with infant

As a caregiver, you can

- Copy what infants do while playing with you. Repeat, or slightly change the action, and wait to see if infants imitate you (infants clap hands, then you clap hands back)
- Play with toys that infants can shake, bang, or push, and give infants time to imitate your actions
- Follow infants' leads and play with them

infants copy
caregiver actions,
such as sticking
out their tongues





Many individuals contributed to the creation of the Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines and this early learning guide.

The Texas Early Learning Council worked with researchers at Children's Learning Institute to write the Guidelines, with help from a diverse group of early childhood stakeholders.

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The Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-
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