



Your early learning guide For Children 8 to 18 Months



Read this guide to help your
child grow and learn!

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Your early learning guide For Children 8 to 18 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.

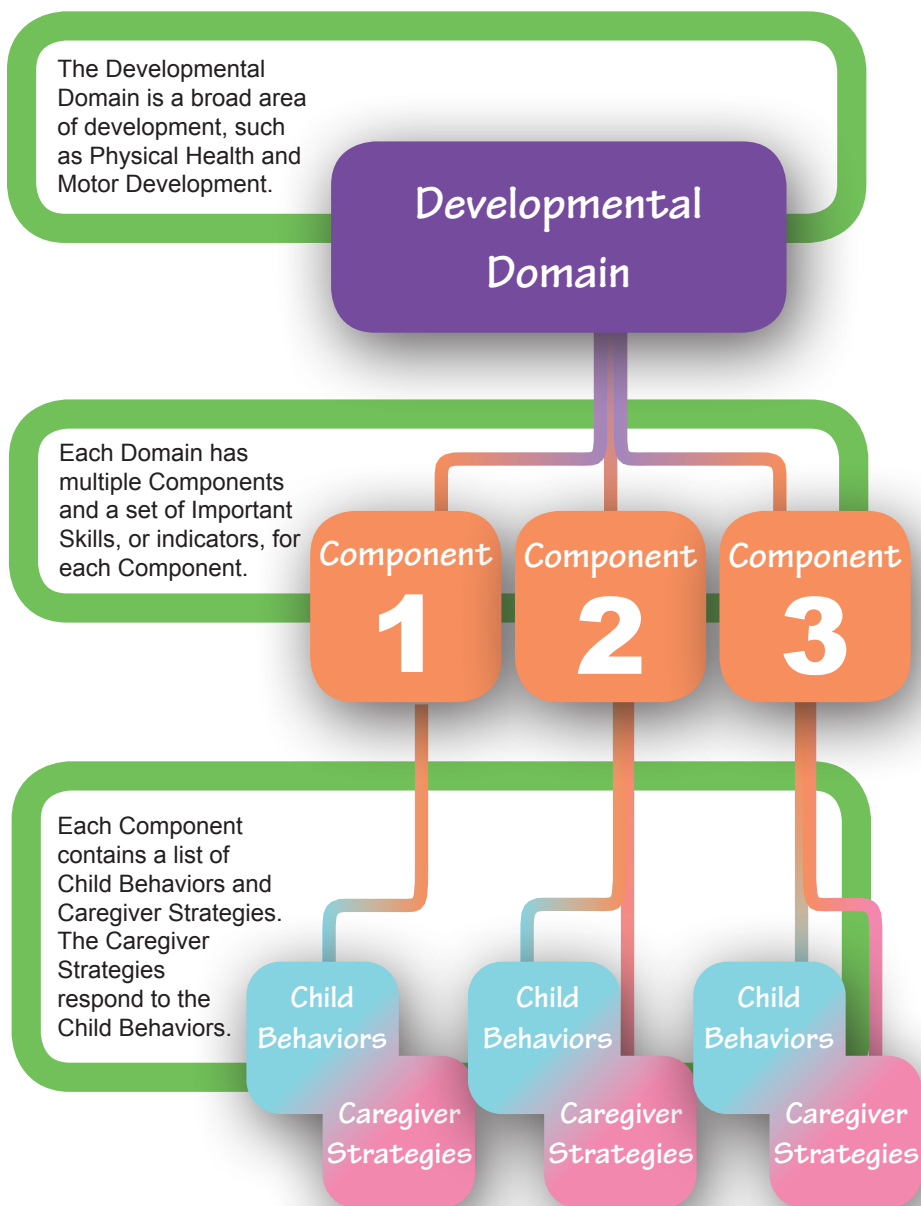
On the following pages, information is organized by *domains*, or categories of development:

- 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

Older infants might

- Feed themselves with some assistance
- Ask, point, or sign for “more” when eating
- Play during bathtime
- Listen to safety warnings and accept redirection
- Show interest in dressing themselves

As a caregiver, you can

- Begin to offer nutritious finger foods and utensils to older infants and allow them to feed themselves
- Encourage older infants to use body language, signs, or words to tell you their wants or needs regarding food and fullness
- Ensure that bathtime is fun, safe, and always supervised for older infants
- Use caution words and a firm, but warm, tone of voice to warn older infants of dangerous items or situations, and redirect their attention
- Allow and encourage older infants to assist with dressing themselves to the best of their abilities

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

Older infants might

- Sit up and maintain balance while playing with a toy
- Crawl on hands and knees
- Use furniture to pull self up, cruise, and lower self from standing to sitting
- Walk on their own and with increasing speed

As a caregiver, you can

- Interact, play with, and offer an assortment of toys to older infants while they are sitting
- Encourage older infants to move to get what they want, such as a toy that is out of reach
- Support older infants' movement by providing opportunities in a variety of indoor and outdoor areas (steps, grass, soft climbing toys, etc.)
- Provide toys that support movement and action with legs, feet, arms, or hands, such as toys with wheels to push or pull
- Notice when older infants begin to sit without support, pull on things to stand, walk along furniture, and take steps

older infants
crawl on hands
and knees



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

Older infants might

- Bang toys together to make sounds or move toys from one hand to the other
- Scoop or rake with their hand to pick up objects, food, etc.
- Use thumb and index finger to pick up, squeeze, or poke small items
- Grab, drop, or throw toys

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide toys or household items for older infants to bang and make sounds
- Provide older infants with nesting cups and two- or three-piece wooden puzzles
- Notice older infants' use of hands, fingers, and thumb to pick up and examine objects
- Provide plenty of items for older infants to practice grabbing
- Notice older infants when they drop or throw their toys and playfully return the toys to them

older infants
grab, drop, or
throw toys



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

Older infants might

- Try to get help from familiar adults with sounds and body language (says “mama” or cries)
- Clap and smile back and forth with familiar adult
- Cry or show fear when separated from their primary caregiver
- Show affection, such as hugs and kisses, leaning in, or reaching out
- Look for familiar adults to comfort them when hungry or tired

As a caregiver, you can

- Notice and be responsive to older infants’ words, gestures, laughs, gazes, and cries
- Stay close by as older infants explore
- Reassure older infants that you will return when you need to leave, explaining where you are going and when you will be back
- Introduce older infants to new people and allow them time to become comfortable

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

Older infants might

- Express a variety of emotions, like happiness, sadness, surprise, and discomfort
- Begin pointing to and naming body parts on themselves and others
- Enjoy making faces at themselves in mirror
- Make choices by shaking head “no” and/or nodding head “yes”
- Enjoy pointing to or naming pictures of family members
- Choose culturally familiar foods over other foods
- Enjoy praise and clapping to celebrate their accomplishments

As a caregiver, you can

- Imitate and name older infants’ facial expressions and watch to see if older infants imitate your facial expressions
- Encourage older infants to point to their body parts when naming them by asking “Where is your nose?”, “Where are your ears?”, etc.
- Show examples of different faces and encourage older infants to make faces in the mirror
- Encourage older infants to point out their choices clearly by showing how to shake head for “no” and nod head for “yes” (say the words while nodding head)
- Make a book of photos of family members and help older infants point to and name each person
- Celebrate older infants’ food choices
- Show excitement (clap or celebrate) for older infants when they show new skills or abilities (“You used your spoon!”)

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

Older infants might

- Use a comfort object for security, such as blanket or toy, when feeling stressed or upset
- Look toward familiar caregivers for help when becoming upset
- Crawl to familiar caregivers who are holding another child
- Express own needs by gesturing or moving toward bottles, toys, or other objects they want
- Use emotional expressions (pouting, whining, and crying) to obtain things they want
- Anticipate and participate in transitions, such as getting a blanket for naptime
- Try different ways to calm themselves when they are upset, such as singing themselves to sleep
- Understand what “no” means

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide older infants with comfort objects
- Provide food, rest, or comfort to older infants when they become hungry, tired, or frustrated
- Observe older infants and speak to them when they look to you for approval or disapproval (“Go ahead, you can pet the doggy.”)
- Call older infants by their names and talk about what you are doing (“Look Jason, now I am folding your blanket.”)
- Provide comfort to older infants during stressful situations to help them manage their emotions
- Manage their own emotions and impulses in a healthy way (remain calm when something breaks and narrate the solution in a calm voice)
- Encourage older infants to participate in transition activities (“It’s almost naptime, Tasha. Can you go get your blanket?”)
- Celebrate positive behaviors and redirect negative behaviors (“Please use soft gentle hands when you touch me.”)
- Allow older infants a few minutes to calm themselves when trying to get to sleep
- Keep schedules, settings, and responses to older infants consistent and regular
- Observe older infants and comment when they look to you for approval (“Let’s move to this area where it is safe, Sandra.”)

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

Older infants might

- Look back and forth between toy and adult while playing
- Reach out to touch another child's face, hair, or other body part
- Grab for an object another child is holding
- Play side-by-side with others using the same or similar toys

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide older infants with times to play with other older infants and provide toys, such as balls and stuffed animals
- Respond to and imitate older infants' gestures when they point to toys, books, or objects (when older infants point to a toy, point to the toy and say happily, "Oh, you want your toy, don't you?")
- Show empathy for adults, children, and animals ("Oh, I see Ana dropped her peaches; she must be sad; let's get her some more peaches.")
- Have more than one of the same toy for older infants
- Stay nearby and watch playtime to promote successful interactions between older infants
- Continue to name and label appropriate touch ("hold hands", "give hugs", "pat gently"), and explain that everyone has their own personal space



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

Older infants might

- Quiet down or get excited when they hear familiar voices
- Look at person who calls their name or is speaking
- Recognize names of familiar objects (cup, banana, juice, etc.)
- Watch and listen while others speak and then speak or make sounds themselves
- Follow simple requests ("Get your ball.")
- Respond with body language or words to simple questions

As a caregiver, you can

- Talk to older infants and use their names in conversations with them
- Watch where older infants focus their attention, then name and describe the people or objects they look at ("Look at the dog's tail! He's wagging his tail.")
- Name and talk about objects that they use with older infants (hand a spoon to the older infant and say, "Here's your spoon.")
- Name and talk about familiar items and people in older infants' home language, if possible
- Respond with words and short sentences after older infants speak or make sounds
- Play simple movement games to help older infants learn to follow directions. Show the right movement while saying the direction ("Let's touch our toes. Now touch your nose.")
- Make requests and ask questions using different and expressive tones of voice
- Follow older infants' lead in short conversations; pause to allow time for older infants to respond

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

Older infants might

- Respond to caregiver's talk by babbling or producing words in reply ("ba-ba-ba" repeated over and over for dialogue)
- Say first words by 8-12 months
- Try to name familiar people and objects like "mama" and "dada"
- Use single words combined with hand motions and body movements to communicate (wave while saying "bye-bye")
- Point or use hand motion to communicate wants or needs
- Begin to repeat words in simple songs and rhymes
- Use approximately 50-100 words in home language or in English by 18 months

As a caregiver, you can

- Watch and imitate older infants' attempts at making sounds, babbling, and stringing words together
- Notice when older infants say their first word and repeat the word
- Introduce new words, sounds, signs, and body language during everyday activities by explaining what older infants are seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting
- Sing songs and play word games with older infants
- Have conversations with older infants using different voice tones, and pause and allow infants to respond
- Follow older infants' lead and interest in items in their surroundings, including naming items for them ("Yes, that's a chair." or "Look at the big red truck.")

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

Older infants might

- Imitate body language and/or make sounds during familiar songs, fingerplays, or rhymes
- Enjoy being read to and exploring books (in home language and in English)
- Point to or name familiar characters, pictures, or photographs in books
- Participate in activities or songs that require listening (listens to songs/ rhymes in English and home language)
- Turn pages of sturdy books, look at the pictures, and make sounds or words
- Reach for and hold various writing tools, such as crayons or chalk
- Make marks or scribbles on paper

As a caregiver, you can

- Say rhymes or sing songs with catchy rhythms throughout daily routines (during bathtime say “Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub...”)
- Make a photo or picture book for older infants that includes family and familiar faces, animals, and favorite things
- Recognize and build on older infants’ interests in particular books or pictures (if an older infant shows interest in a picture, slow down and talk about it)
- Have various types of durable, sturdy books for older infants: books with bright drawings, photographs, activity books (lift the flap or sliding parts)
- Point out printed language in books as you read to older infants
- Give older infants access to various age-appropriate drawing and writing tools (crayons, paints, etc.), and teach them how to use and care for them

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

Older infants might

- Look at books
- Look to see where objects went when they are dropped
- Touch and feel others' faces, skin, or hair
- Enjoy playing with objects that make sounds and pay attention to different sounds objects can make, such as drums, noise makers, or bells
- Ask to continue a game by signing or saying "more"
- Push a button on a toy to make objects pop up or to make a sound over and over again
- Sit on a rocking horse or toy and move it back and forth
- Look closely at small objects, such as pieces of paper or leaves
- Put a shape in a box with different shape openings (shape sorters)
- Stack blocks or objects

As a caregiver, you can

- Share books with older infants. Show them books with interesting colors, patterns, pictures, and textures
- Notice when older infants drop items and pick them up, and allow them to repeat
- Allow older infants to touch your face, skin, or hair and name body parts ("That's my nose. Here's your nose.")
- Provide toys and objects that make noise, and create opportunities to make and listen to different sounds together (crunch leaves or bang on pots and pans)
- Notice and respond positively to older infants' desire to play games over and over again
- Create an environment that encourages discovery, and give uninterrupted playtime
- Give older infants safe toys to repeat motions, such as rocking, sliding, or balancing
- Engage and play alongside older infants
- Celebrate when older infants learn how to use a toy or object

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

Older infants might

- Use objects or utensils to bang on table and make noise
- Crawl into, around, or over obstacles
- Attempt to nest three or four cups of different sizes
- Enjoy taking objects out of containers and putting them back in
- Ask, gesture, or sign to be picked up to reach something

As a caregiver, you can

- Keep toys around that respond to older infants' actions, such as pop-up boxes, squeaky toys, and musical instrument toys
- Create a variety of safe spaces and objects for older infants to crawl over, around, and through
- Give older infants similar toys of different sizes that can nest (bowls, measuring cups, nesting cups)
- Show excitement when older infants discover new uses for things (putting blocks in a box or pot)
- Keep containers filled with objects around and encourage filling and emptying the containers
- Watch for and encourage older infants' use of words, signs, and gestures, such as pointing and reaching to signal what they want

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

Older infants might

- Enjoy playing peek-a-boo
- Look for hidden objects or toys
- Ask for a familiar caregiver when not present
- Look for a favorite object in its usual location, and ask for it when not present
- Recognize a favorite book when caregiver calls it by name
- Bring familiar people their shoes or other personal objects

As a caregiver, you can

- Play games with older infants that allow for turn-taking, and watch for older infants to repeat these games in new situations or with other people
- Play hide-and-find games by placing a toy under a cloth or other cover for older infants to find
- Talk about familiar caregivers when they are not present
- Keep toys and familiar objects in consistent locations so older infants begin to learn where things are kept
- Recognize older infants' favorite books and read with them over and over again
- Comment when older infants remember something belongs to you or someone else ("Yes, those are Luna's shoes.")

older infants enjoy
playing peek-a-boo



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

Older infants might

- Imitate adult actions (waving “bye-bye” or brushing hair)
- Play with toys the way they are intended, such as pretending to drink tea from a toy tea cup
- Pretend to feed doll or stuffed animal with their own bottle or food

As a caregiver, you can

- Play games and do fingerplays in which older infants can imitate actions, such as “Itsy Bitsy Spider” and “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”
- Make available toys (or real objects) that older infants can pretend play with, such as cups, spoons, and telephones, and show what the toy does or is used for (pretend to eat with a toy spoon)
- Notice and comment positively on older infants’ pretend play (“I see you are feeding the baby. I bet she’s hungry!”)

older infants
imitate adult
actions, such as
waving “bye-bye”





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-
Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines
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