

Your early learning guide For Children 18 to 36 Months

Your early learning guide for infants, toddlers and three-year-olds



Read this guide to help your child grow and learn!

Your early learning guide For Children 18 to 36 Months

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Your early learning guide For Children 18 to 36 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.

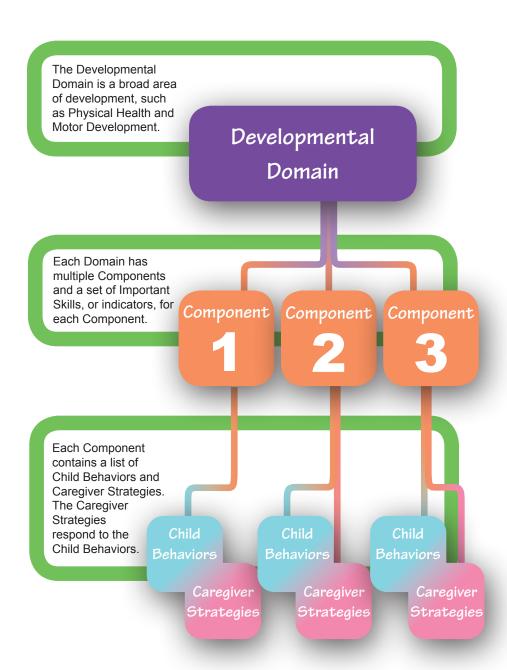
On the following pages, information is organized by *domains*, or categories of development:

- 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

Toddlers might

Participate in healthy care activities like washing hands and brushing teeth

- Use body language, sign, or say "wet!" to indicate wet or soiled pants
- Make personal food choices among several healthy options ("Want apple.")
- Eat with a spoon and fork and drink from a cup with some assistance
- Dress themselves with help
- Begin to respond to verbal safety warnings ("Danger. Hot.")

- Help and support toddlers by establishing healthy self-care activities like hand washing and brushing teeth
- Respond promptly to toddlers' awareness of being wet or soiled
- Allow toddlers to use body language or words to express wants or needs regarding food
- Provide plenty of healthy food options, including foods from various cultures
- Provide foods that toddlers can easily scoop or stab (oatmeal, pudding, fruit, and beans)
- Support and encourage toddlers when they make efforts to help dress themselves
- Talk to toddlers about using safe behaviors and remind them to be aware of possibly dangerous situations

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

Toddlers might

Walk easily or run from place to place

- Jump into puddles, piles of leaves, or sandboxes
- Climb on chairs, stools, and playground equipment
- Enjoy playing on slides and swings
- Kick or throw a large ball toward another child or adult
- Climb stairs one step at a time

As a caregiver, you can

- Play with toddlers indoors and outdoors and observe their increasing ability to run, jump, and climb
- Encourage toddlers to play on different kinds of fun things at playgrounds and parks (bouncy toys, climbing areas, play castles, etc.)
- Create opportunities for toddlers to play with other children

toddlers like to jump into puddles



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

Toddlers might

Build a small tower with toy blocks

- Fit objects together by pressing and turning (peg in small hole, ring onto pole, nesting, etc.)
- Dig in sand with spoon or shovel
- Tear paper
- Put on easy clothing (button and unbutton large buttons, unzip large zippers)
- Play with and complete simple puzzles

As a caregiver, you can

- Offer toys for stacking and ask toddlers to build higher and higher towers
- Provide toddlers with toys that require eyehand coordination (nesting cups, fill and dump containers, stacking rings, sorting toys, large peg boards, etc.)
- Provide toddlers with toys that allow them to explore and practice delicate movements (beads to string, lacing cards, crayons, markers, and paper)
- Notice toddlers' attempts to zip, unzip, or button, and praise them for trying; give help when needed
- Provide toddlers with a variety of puzzles with different numbers of pieces, made of different materials (wood, cardboard, foam, etc.)

toddlers like to dig in sand with a spoon or shovel



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:

- 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

Toddlers might

Express affection for familiar caregivers, such as telling a caregiver "love you" or greeting a caregiver excitedly

- Check back with caregiver often when playing or exploring
- Reach for familiar caregivers when unfamiliar adults approach
- Look for familiar caregivers after falling down or getting hurt
- Take a familiar toy or blanket along on a trip or a visit to a new place

- Respond quickly and sensitively to toddlers' emotional and physical needs
- Stay close by while toddlers begin to explore their surroundings and people, and as they begin to play or pretend play
- Continue to reassure toddlers when you or other familiar adults will return
- Provide encouragement for trying activities and playing with or meeting new people
- Accept that toddlers will need comfort items (blanket, favorite toy, pacifier, etc.) to bring with them on trips or visits to new places

Self-Awareness

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

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

Toddlers might

Recognize and name their own emotions

- In front of the mirror, point to and name many body parts
- Begin to describe themselves in words ("I run fast!", "I strong", "I got brown hair")
- Show pride in own accomplishments by smiling, clapping, cheering for themselves, or saying, "I did it!"
- Say first and last name when asked
- Use words and actions to assert themselves ("No!", "Mine!", while pushing another child away)
- Choose areas to play in or activities they prefer

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As a caregiver, you can

- Respond to toddlers' emotional expressions by naming their emotions ("I can see that you look very sad today, Samad. Is it because you don't have your favorite book?")
- Respond positively to toddlers' interest in their bodies by naming different body parts ("Yes, that is your elbow!")
- Respond positively to toddlers when they share their own traits and identity characteristics ("Yes, you do have brown hair!")
- Recognize toddlers' accomplishments with positive words and gestures ("Wow, Amer, you did that all by yourself!"; give high-five or hug)
- Help toddlers practice answering questions, such as "What is your name?"
- Notice and respond to toddlers' need for space by using words and actions to help toddlers become more aware of personal space ("Here is your chair, Marcus, and this is where you sit and eat your snack.")

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Self-Awareness, continued

Toddlers might

- Place their own items in their own cubby or area
- Begin to show comfort in a greater variety of familiar settings important to family, such as church, local library, or neighborhood park
- Name things related to family's culture ("menorah", "Christmas tree", "sari")

As a caregiver, you can

- Offer toddlers many different opportunities to make choices ("Would you rather have apples or peaches for a snack?")
- Create special places where toddlers can keep their favorite toys and other personal things
- Point out familiar locations while taking a neighborhood walk

toddlers begin to show comfort in a greater variety of familiar settings important to family, such as a neighborhood park



Self-Regulation

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

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

Toddlers might

Recover from emotional outbursts (tantrums, biting, or hitting) in a few minutes with adult support

- Use words to obtain things they want
- Begin to use various emotion words, such as "I'm mad."
- Listen to and begin to follow rules
- Change to new or different activities with adult support
- Show beginnings of selfcontrol, such as walking around rain puddles
- Say "no" or shake head when they don't want to do something or don't like something

- Respond warmly when toddlers are frustrated or having a tantrum
- Have a quiet space or cozy corner available for toddlers
- Make sure toddlers are safe from harm while they are having a tantrum, let them know you are nearby to help when they are ready, but give them plenty of space and time to release frustration
- Notice and name toddlers' feelings and behaviors
- Help toddlers begin to understand that their actions affect others ("When you bite her, Margie, it hurts her.")
- Use labels with pictures on shelves to show where things belong
- Prepare toddlers for transitions to new activities by announcing plans, talking with, and listening to them
- Offer toddlers two real choices that are both OK ("You can walk to the table on your own, or I can help you.")
- Play games to help toddlers practice following directions

Relationships with Others

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

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

Toddlers might

- Play with toys with other children or include other children in pretend play
- Show interest or concern for another child who is hurt or has fallen
- Know the names of familiar playmates and show favorite playmates by holding hands, sharing toys, and getting excited when friends arrive
- Watch and copy another child's behavior or activity
- Take turns during play with other toddlers, with lots of adult assistance

As a caregiver, you can

- Show and explain positive social interactions ("It looks like Jamie wants to be part of your game. Can he join you?")
- Notice and celebrate toddlers' efforts to help and care for their peers ("You stopped to help Allison, Jamal. Thank you.")
- Encourage growing empathy skills by naming feelings and talking about how our actions affect others ("When you hit Sammy, it hurts his body.")
- Support toddlers when their first attempts
 at interactions fail ("It looks like you want to
 build with the blocks, too. When your friend is
 finished with the toy, it will be your turn.")
- Provide opportunities for toddlers to play with other children regularly
- Give toddlers plenty of toys that can be played with by two or more of them at once

toddlers like to include others in pretend play



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

Toddlers might

Imitate caregiver's different vocal sounds and body language

- Laugh after caregiver says something funny
- Quiet and listen when caregivers say they have something to say
- Let others know when they want a turn to talk (says "me" or "my turn")
- · Follow two-step requests
- Show understanding by pointing to or touching a picture in a book or talking about some part of a book
- Begin to talk or converse with other toddlers during play (listening and paying attention to each other)

- Give toddlers toys and experiences that allow them to hear different animal and people sounds
- Play and laugh with toddlers often when something funny or silly happens
- Notice when toddlers want to talk and let them know when it's their turn by saying, "It's your turn. What do you want to tell me?"
- Give toddlers some two-part directions ("Please sit on the bed and hold your foot up, so I can put on your sock.")
- Ask questions about different characters or objects in a book during one-on-one book reading
- Support toddlers' communication with others by watching the way they play and talk to each other and by providing comments as needed ("Maria wants to play dolls with you. Can you show her your doll?")

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

Toddlers might

Combine words into simple sentences ("Mommy bye-bye" or "milk all gone")

- Use new words in everyday experiences ("books in box")
- Ask caregivers to help name unfamiliar objects
- Use three- to four-word sentences with a noun and a verb
- Use approximately 400 words in home language or in English by 30 months
- Use approximately 1000 words in home language or in English by 36 months

- Notice and support toddlers when they begin to put two or more words together to form sentences by repeating the words and adding more ("Yes, Mommy went bye-bye. She'll come back very soon.")
- Follow toddlers' interests in items in their surroundings, constantly naming them or when introducing new materials and objects
- Respond to toddlers' questions with clear and simple answers and explanations
- Speak in complete sentences with toddlers.
 ("Yes, that is a banana. This is the section of the grocery store where we pick our fruit.")
- Respond to toddlers' questions with answers and explanations
- Ask toddlers to describe objects using all five of their senses ("What do you hear?", "What do you smell?", "How does it feel?")
- Ask toddlers "wh" (who, what, where, when, why) questions that require more than oneword responses ("What are you going to do this weekend?")
- Provide playtime games and activities that encourage toddlers to talk with friends

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

Toddlers might

Sing along with familiar songs, fingerplays, or rhymes

- Enjoy singing familiar songs or saying rhymes with and without adult assistance
- Begin to produce real or nonsense words that sound alike
- Enjoy being read to and exploring books and reading materials on their own (in English and in home language)
- Ask to be read to and has favorite books
- Pretend to read familiar books

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As a caregiver, you can

- Read and re-read to toddlers often, especially when they ask (if you cannot read at that moment, plan a later time to share the book together)
- Encourage toddlers to read a familiar book to you in their own way (pretend reading)
- Point out large and noticeable print and titles when reading to toddlers
- Use magnetic letters, bathtub letters, etc. to show toddlers how you can put letters together to spell meaningful words
- Talk to toddlers about print in their environment (food packages, street signs, store signs, warning labels)
- Give toddlers a wide variety of drawing and writing tools and continue to teach them how to use and care for them

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Emergent Literacy, continued

Toddlers might

- Name and describe familiar characters, pictures, or photographs in books with adult assistance
- Recall characters or events in familiar books
- Recognize some print or symbols in their surroundings (stop sign, local store sign)
- Make circular scribbles, line marks, or letter-like forms when asked to write
- Try different ways to grip or use writing and drawing tools, such as crayons or paintbrushes
- Identify some letters (the first letter in their name) with assistance

As a caregiver, you can

 Ask toddlers open-ended questions about their drawing and writing ("What did you draw?" or "Tell me about your work"), and offer to write down what they say about the drawings

toddlers make circular scribbles when asked to write





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:

- Pays attention and exhibits curiosity in people and objects
- 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

Toddlers might

- Notice, point at, or talk about animals or insects
- Pick up rocks, sticks, or other objects when outdoors
- Pour, scoop, and explore sand and water
- Match colors and shapes and sort toys or objects that are alike
- Show interest in mixing colors of water or paints
- Push/pull riding toys in order to make them move

- Recognize toddlers' interest in the natural world and help describe what they see, hear, and experience
- Explore surroundings and talk about how things are similar
 and different
- Provide toddlers with a dirt or sand and water area that includes tools, such as cups, scoops, buckets, shovels, or sifters
- Provide household items for toddlers to sort into groups of similar colors, types, or shapes (socks, cups, plastic lids)
- Help toddlers mix colored water or finger paints and talk about the experience
- Describe how toddlers can use their bodies to make things move or change
- Model how toddlers can do different things with toys (throw a ball into a basket)
- Provide toys that require pushing, pulling, pouring, sorting, and matching

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
- Begins to develop interests and skills related to numbers and counting

Toddlers might

Ask for the names of new objects or people ("What's that?" or "Who's that?")

- Climb on a stool to reach an object
- Experiment with new toys to see how they work
- Turn puzzle pieces many different ways to complete a puzzle
- Count objects while pointing to each one and saying the number (oneto-one correspondence)
- Offer to trade toys with other children

As a caregiver, you can

- Ask toddlers questions, express wonder about problems, and respond to questions with enthusiasm ("I wonder how that happened?")
- Create a safe environment for using large objects as tools, such as stepping on a foot rest to get a toy
- Give toddlers colorful inset puzzles and help them learn to match and turn pieces to fit them
- Count with toddlers while pointing to each object ("There are seven peas on your plate: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7.")
- Demonstrate and encourage offering trades with other children to get a desired toy

toddlers count
objects by pointing
to each one and
saying the number



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

Toddlers might

Go to the correct location for familiar activity (goes to bathroom when caregiver says "It's time for your bath")

- Know what sounds animals make
 and can make the sounds
- Recognize and name people and animals
- Use words and phrases that familiar caregivers use ("Be right back." or "See you later.")
- Sing familiar songs over and over
- Bring favorite book to caregiver to have it read to them
- Know familiar words and complete sentences in their favorite books

- Talk with toddlers about where different activities happen and what we do there
- Sing songs and play music that includes animals and their sounds
- Play memory games with toddlers (ask toddlers to identify and name objects in pictures and photographs)
- Understand that toddlers will use your phrases and words. Praise them when they do ("That's right, Eva will be right back!")
- Sing favorite songs frequently and notice when toddlers sing them on their own
- Ask toddlers to choose what songs or books they would like to sing/read ("OK, what book do you want to read next?")

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

Toddlers might

- Imitate adult actions, such as pretending to wipe a dirty table or talking on the phone
- Pretend to drink from an empty cup by making slurping noises and saying "ah" when finished
- Pretend objects are other things, such as a banana for a phone or a block for a car
- Pretend that a doll or stuffed animal has feelings, such as making a crying noise to indicate that the doll is sad
- Play with stuffed animals one day to play "veterinarian" and then to play "farmer" another day

- Keep a variety of toys and objects available for pretend play, such as dolls, stuffed animals, dishes, and blocks, and enter into pretend play with toddlers (have a pretend phone conversation)
- Make playful sounds that people, animals, or cars make and show toddlers how to use these sounds and toys in pretend play (push a toy car saying "Vrooom Vrooom")
- Notice and comment when toddlers use other objects as a substitute for the real thing, such as using a banana as a phone ("Are you talking on the phone? Who are you talking to?")
- Suggest next steps in pretend play (if toddlers pretend to feed a baby doll, suggest that they cover the baby with a blanket and rock it to sleep)
- Play with toddlers using pretend roles, such as you are a farmer on a farm and they are animals on the farm
- Suggest new roles for toys to toddlers (a toy kitchen can become a pretend restaurant kitchen)

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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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