

Child Developmental Milestones

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Foundations for Practice



This resource has been developed by Berry Street Take Two's Developmental Specialists and Aboriginal Clinical teams, with input from Yorta Yorta woman Dr Mishel McMahon, Senior Research Fellow at La Trobe Rural Health School.

Berry Street's Take Two program is a specialist trauma service helping children cope with mental health impacts of abuse, neglect and family violence. We use evidence-informed approaches, neurobiological research and clinical frameworks to develop networks of supportive adults to provide what the child needs.

We believe all infants, children and young people have the right to feel safe, loved and valued.

Berry Street's Take Two Program is a partnership with:



VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL
CHILD CARE AGENCY



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This guide helps explain key stages of child development. Evidence-based understanding of child development is an essential component of good practice when working with children. Having a good grounding in typical child development helps identify delays or differences. Healthy child development supports wellbeing throughout life.



The term 'children' refers to all people under the age of 18 years – including pre-birth, newborn, babies, toddlers, pre-school, school-aged children, pre-teens, teenagers and young adults.

In this guide

The guide covers the biological, psychological and social changes that occur in children from before birth to the end of adolescence, as they progress from total dependence on caregivers to the interdependence of adulthood.

It is broken down by age groups and into distinct domains of development:

- cognitive
- speech and language
- social and relational
- emotional
- physical and sensory
- sleep.

A word on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families



Family, Community, Ancestors, Country, languages and Culture are integral to the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their sense of identity, belonging, healing and overall wellbeing.

Development principles informed by a child's Community and Culture have a significant impact on a child or young person's social, emotional, health, educational and psychological development.

Community and Culture help to shape their transition into adulthood as strong, resilient and connected people. Parents are prescriptive only when they need to be, such as when there is a serious threat to the child.

: All children have their own agency, their own decision-making abilities on all matters. From this mothers have no routines, child-rearing is responsive not prescriptive. The mothers appeared to have no set routines for their babies; their interventions and care were responsive to their babies' needs, not prescriptive. (Kruske, 2012, p.781).

An overarching principle from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature is that development is child-led and not age-related. From this foundation, these developmental guidelines act as prompts, not descriptive expectations.

Pre-natal

First Trimester

- 0 to 8 weeks: Embryo is formed.
- 8+ weeks: Embryo has become a foetus.

Second Trimester

- 19 to 21 weeks: Foetus can move facial muscles, yawn, suck thumb.
- 24 weeks: Responds to sounds, inner ear canal developed. Vestibular system is structurally complete, but functionally immature.

Third Trimester

- By 7 months gestation all the senses are developed.
- Increasing development of proprioception (awareness of their own body) due to pressure of womb on growing foetus.





Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – pre-natal

- Relatedness or social relational growth begins before conception when a Spirit Child comes up from Country, to begin pregnancy. So even before conception a Spirit Child holds relationships with their Ancestors and Country.
- During pregnancy and birth a child is transitioning into their social self. Singing during pregnancy and holding a child after birth for skin-to-skin contact is important. During the perinatal period babies are transitioning from spirit self to social self. They need special care and ceremony to encourage them to transition through this post-birth period.
- In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, men do not attend the birth of their babies as this is deemed 'women's business'.
- Broad definition of family may include relations, friends, pets, other animals, landscapes, waterways and Ancestors. There is equality between all entities.



First 4 months

Cognitive

- Startles at sudden noises.
- Follows people and objects with eyes.
- Turns in the direction of voices.
- Will follow a moving object.
- Learns by holding, mouthing, and looking at different objects.
- Uses hands and eyes together.

Speech and language

- Orientates to the voice of primary caregivers.
- Changes vocalisations to communicate hunger, boredom, tiredness.
- Makes cooing sounds and shares eye contact with others who interact with baby.
- Smiles when spoken to.

Social and relational

- Gazes at faces within close proximity (from birth).
- Makes eye contact with caregiver during feeding.
- Smiles at familiar faces.
- Participates in and initiates interactions with caregivers.
- Laughs out loud.

Emotional

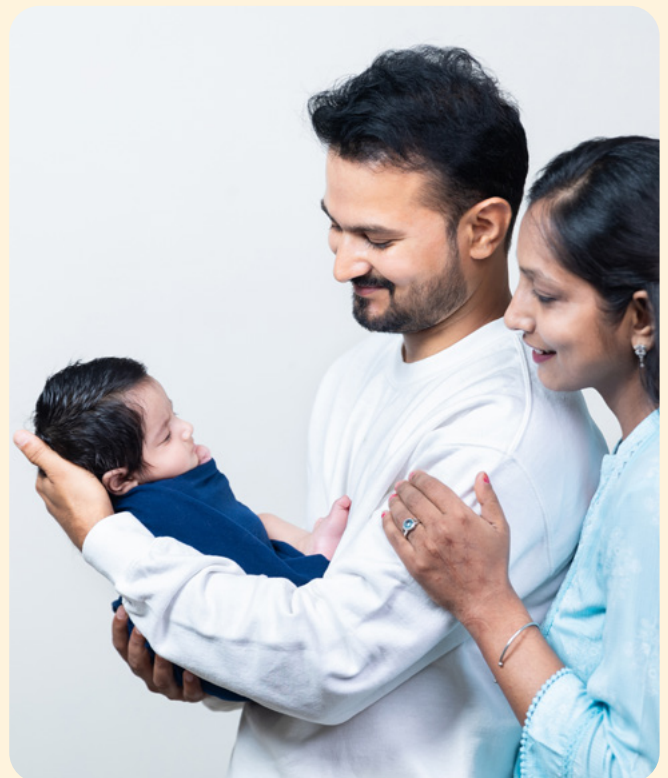
- Smiles selectively at caregiver's voice.
- Begins to self-soothe and regulate emotions through caregiver.
- Plays alone with contentment.
- Distinguishes primary caregiver from others.

Physical

- Reflexes such as rooting (turning their head and opening mouth in search of milk) and sucking are well established by birth, so newborn is well equipped to form a strong bond with caregiver and actively participate in nursing.
- Uses body and senses to explore their environment.
- Uses hands and mouth for sensory exploration of objects.
- Quiets when picked up.
- Shows pleasure when touched and held.
- Hands are often open (not in fists).
- Can lie on tummy with head held up.
- Can wave a rattle and start to play with own fingers and toes.
- Pulls to sit without head lag.
- Rolls from stomach to back.

Sleep

- Newborns generally sleep for 16 to 20 hours in a 24-hour period, but wake every 2 to 4 hours to be fed.
- By 3 months old, babies average 14 to 15 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period.



First 4 months



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – newborns

- Children are born capable from their Ancestral memory and DNA. Based in the belief children come from Country and all Country is beautiful – it is believed all children are born innately compassionate, good and nurturing.
- Children are born with their own rhythm, gifts and skills. Community will try to learn and celebrate this strength-based identity.
- The child's name or how family members refer to them, together with phrases used between each other grows relatedness and part of their social and emotional identity.
- Mothers are central for breastfeeding for the first few years because care of children is responsive to the child's needs. In some communities other women such as aunts breastfeed.
- Children are sung to in language by both the father and mother for nurture (e.g., singing a traditional 'lullaby' or songline). If the child is ill there are Community members who can sing healing songs and/or provide traditional medicinal care.
- Children are centre of Community. Members of their Community will want to introduce themselves to the baby. In the first few months, infants are often taken to many family gatherings and held by many family members. This social world enables a child to begin to grow their relatedness with others, and their collective identity.
- Physical closeness is important, with all ages sharing a social world. As a child grows older, they are not separated from their social world of adults and other children.
- Sounds, whistles and non-verbal communication is used to develop relatedness and attachment.
- A child's Community will celebrate a child's social attributes or ability to connect with many members of family, to learn about them and communicate in nuanced ways.



6 months

Cognitive

- Demonstrates anticipation of routine.
- Makes associations between what is heard, tasted or felt.
- Experiments with cause and effect.
- Learns by touching and tasting different foods.

Speech and language

- Responds to the tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions of those around them.
- Can be attentive to speech and orient to sound with their eyes.
- Beginning to respond to their name being called.
- Enjoys playing with sounds (coo, squeal, gurgle, babble etc.) when content or engaged with a caregiver.

Social and relational

- Smiles at unfamiliar people.
- Maintains eye contact.
- Uses carer for comfort and security as attachment increases.
- Likely to be wary of strangers.

Emotional

- Responds to other people's emotions.

Physical

Fine motor

- Plays with hands at midline.
- Transfers objects hand to hand.
- Grasps objects and finger, and reaches for objects.
- Inspects objects with hands, eyes, and mouth.

Gross motor

- Sits propping on hands.
- Plays (bounce) when standing with support from parents/caregivers.
- Integrates information from multiple sensory systems.
- Kicks reciprocally when lying on back.
- Rolls from front to back and back to front.
- Keeps head level with body when pull to sitting.

Sleep

- Most babies at this age sleep 14 hours on average in a 24-hour period.
- Sleeping varies a lot, but usually nap 3 times during the day. Most babies need help to settle to sleep.



9 months

Cognitive

- Works to get a toy out of reach.
- Looks for a dropped object.
- Knows that hidden objects exist.
- Can wave goodbye and play 'peekaboo'.
- Lets you know when help is wanted with facial expressions, gesture, and sound or words.

Speech and language

- Babbling now with a range of consonant sounds (m, n, d, t, b, k, w) and neutral vowels.
- Imitates sounds and vocal tone when engaged in conversational play by caregivers.
- Reliably responds to name being called now, often turning to look and smile at person calling them warmly.
- Uses at least 2 communicative gestures (shakes head 'no', waves goodbye, points to show interest, shows items when asked, bangs table to get attention, reaches to be picked up etc.).

Social and relational

- Strongly participates in, and initiates interactions with caregivers.
- Becoming more discriminating about relationships, so will be anxious when separated from caregivers.
- Usually anxious and wary with strangers.
- Actively seeks adult attention, wants to be picked up and held.

Emotional

- Watches reactions to emotions, and by seeing caregivers express feelings, starts to recognise and imitate happy, sad, excited, or fearful emotions.
- Will frown, stare, or cry at strangers.

Physical

Sensory

- Enjoys being held up in the air and moving rapidly through the air by a trusted adult.

Fine motor

- Reaches for and grasps objects.
- Grasps small objects in fingertips.
- Crudely uses tools.
- Solid food and a range of foods are eaten.
- Finger feeds part of meal.
- Chews and bites on toys.

Gross motor

- Lifts head and raises trunk when lying on tummy.
- Sits independently.
- Stands, holding on for support.
- Able to shuffle on their bottom, crawl, or stand.
- Keeps head level with body when pull to sitting.

Sleep

- Most nap during the day for 1 to 2 hours, some sleep longer.
- Most are ready for bed between 6 and 10pm.
- Many wake during the night and need an adult to settle them back to sleep.
- About 1 in 10 will wake 3 to 4 times per night.



12 months

Cognitive

- Can indicate wants in ways other than crying.
- Plays with 2 objects at the same time.
- Learns and grows in confidence by doing things repeatedly and exploring.
- Searches for an object after it is hidden.
- Beginning to understand cause and effect.
- Has a favourite object.

Speech and language

- Can follow the caregiver's gaze and looks in the same direction as caregiver when curious.
- Understands between 3 and 50 words.
- First words emerge between 9 and 15 months. May use up to 12 words at 12 months old.
- Uses at least 8 communicative gestures (see 9 months list for examples) with others.

Social and relational

- Enjoys communicating with family and other familiar people.
- Seeks comfort and reassurance from familiar objects, family and caregivers, and can be soothed by them.
- Does not like to be separated from familiar people.
- Imitates social actions (e.g., talking on the phone).
- Repeats performances that are laughed at.

Emotional

- Begins to self-soothe when distressed.
- Expresses feeling with gestures, sounds and facial expressions.
- Is sensitive to approval and disapproval.
- Shows awareness of the emotions of others.

Physical

Fine motor

- Picks up things between thumb and index finger.
- Crawls while holding an object.
- Clasps hands.
- Uses a string to pull a toy.
- Can use index finger to poke and point.
- Reaches for spoon to help with feeding self.
- Drinks from a cup with assistance, or sippy-cup independently.

Gross motor

- Pivots while sitting, moves from sitting to standing.
- Walks with and without support.
- Stands holding on for support.
- Can crawl freely on hands and knees.

Sleep

- Most babies at this age sleep 13 to 15 hours over a 24-hour period. Most nap twice a day until around 18 months old.





Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – 12 months

- Children are parented by Ancestors, entities of Country, Community and the Kid Mob.
- Children are 'fitted in' within their community, to maintain their social world and strong support networks. This means children may be shifted between family members in their best interest for short periods or longer time frames.
- Attachment is relational and complex with Ancestors, Country and Community.
- Attachment figures may be human and non-human, seen and unseen. Gender, ages and roles may require different attachments with particular family members.
- Emotionally meaningful attachments are grown over time with Community members, Ancestors and entities of Country. These attachments may be fluid and changing.
- Infants may be held more until they are old enough to communicate.
- Children form attachment to Community members, their Ancestors and Country and may not display separation anxiety when separated from close family.
- Infants are introduced to their Moieties, Totems, and songlines in language. This is the beginning of introducing them to their rights and responsibilities based on what Moiety and Totems they receive.



18 months

Cognitive

- Turning pages of a book.
- Plays simple pretend games (e.g., feeds a doll).
- Points to self when asked.
- Plays with objects according to intended use (e.g., push a toy truck and empty it).

Speech and language

- Understands more than 100 words, including family member's names, body parts, common actions, clothing, food, animals, household objects, destinations, etc.
- Average expressive vocabulary is 50 to 100 words, although the typical range is wide (12 to 200 words).
- Speech articulation is simplified and infantile versions of common words (e.g., bo-bo for bottle, ba-yi for blanket).
- Uses at least 18 communicative gestures with others.
- Can point to 6 body parts.

Social and relational

- Vocalises more than cries for attention from others.
- Imitates adult activities.
- Interested in strangers, but appropriately wary.
- Asserts autonomy (e.g., 'me do').

Emotional

- Sharing humour with peers or adults.

Physical

Sensory

- Enjoys messy activities.
- Reacts to extreme sensations such as warm, cold, sweet.
- May begin to reject unfamiliar food and show fussiness.

Fine motor

- Uses 2 hands in play, 1 to hold and the other to stabilise.
- Stacks 2 blocks.
- Places toys in containers, even small containers.
- Drinks from a cup.
- Inhibits drooling.

Gross motor

- Explores all spaces in the room.
- Rolls and crawls in play close to the ground.
- Walks up steps with help.
- Pulls toys while walking.
- Helps undress themselves (e.g., pulls off hat, socks).
- Can walk and run.
- Stoops and stand ups again.
- Climbs on furniture.

Sleep

- Often go from having 2 naps to 1 longer daytime nap.
- Some babies this age start to resist going to sleep at night, preferring to stay up with the family. This peaks at around 18 months and tends to go away with age.



2 years

Cognitive

- Can match shapes.
- Recognise and identifies 2 items in a picture by pointing.
- Mimics real life situations during play.
- Discriminates between edible and non-edible substances.
- Builds a tower of 4 or more blocks.

Speech and language

- Understands more than 200 words (nouns, adjectives, verbs).
- Average expressive vocabulary is about 250 words, again with a wide range considered normal (55 to 500 words).
- Uses two-word combinations for a range of purposes (e.g., to request, reject, describe, be playful, encourage, share interest, ask questions etc.).
- Asks 'what' and 'who' questions.
- Uses 'my' and 'mine'.
- Points to at least 10 body parts.
- Holds a book the usual way and turns pages in the expected direction.

Social and relational

- Enjoys being with other young children.
- Plays alongside other children, but not with them.
- Plays alone but needs a familiar adult nearby.
- Is conscious of family as a group.
- May indicate wet or soiled nappy.

Emotional

- Enjoys simple stories from a book.
- Shows a range of emotions (e.g., embarrassment, pride, shame, guilt, and empathy.)
- Has temper tantrums when frustrated.
- Enjoys role playing.
- Claims and defends ownership of own things.

Physical

Sensory

- Enjoys solitary play for a few minutes.
- Uses play dough.
- Enjoys rough and tumble play.

Fine motor

- Holds crayon in fingertips and draws simple figures (straight stroke or circular stroke).
- Begins to use simple tools (like play hammer).
- Participates in multipart tasks.
- Drinks using a straw and uses spoon with little spillage.
- Can take clothes off.
- Turns single pages and wiggles thumb.
- Turns knobs.
- Can cope with most food offered.

Gross motor

- Runs.
- Climbs on jungle gym and slides.
- Kicks ball forward and throws ball at a large target.
- Jumps with both feet in place.
- Walks up and down stairs.
- Stands on tiptoes.
- Uses feet on the ground to move a ride-on toy.
- Pushes and pulls a large object.

Sleep

- Generally sleeps 12 to 13 hours in a 24-hour period including daytime naps of 1 to 2 hours.
- Once attempting to climb out of their cot, it is time to move them to a bed. This usually happen around 2 to 3.5 years but can be as early as 18 months.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – 2 years

- Inappropriate behaviour is regarded as silly and temporary.
- Encouraged to regulate their own behaviour, form their own agency and knowledge.
- All people, children and adults hold knowledge to make decisions. An individual's agency and equality create confidence, resilience and self-efficacy from conception to death.
- Humans hold knowledges from their lived experiences, from observing the world but also from Ancestral memory, dreams, Ancestral stories and their intuition.
- Indirect behaviour modification through teasing, humour, scaring, loaded questions, silence and stories are used during communication. Indirect communication positions equality between two people, encourages self-agency and builds rapport. Different from Western use of direct communication.
- Kinship language proficiency celebrated by a child's family.
- Further age-appropriate exposure to their rights and responsibilities about their Totems and songlines.
- Fathers and mothers play an equal role in nurturing, providing guidance, and leading by example. Fathers and other men in the community may begin to introduce their sons to men's business by singing traditional songlines to their children.
- Children will witness traditional fishing (and perhaps hunting) provided caregivers are available to look after the child.



3 years

Cognitive

- Completes puzzles with 3 to 4 pieces.
- Plays thematic make believe.
- Plays independently for 5 minutes.
- Attends to a story for 5 minutes.
- Avoids simple hazards.
- Has concept of 2 or 3 and can count 2 to 3 items.
- Identifies 2 to 3 colours.
- Remembers a recent event with the aid of a photograph.

Speech and language

- Speech and language can be understood by others about 75 per cent of the time.
- Speaks in sentences of 3 to 5 words. Grammar simplified and telegraphic.
- Vocabulary of at least 800 words, including all parts of speech: pronouns, articles, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.
- Asks many 'who', 'what', and 'where' questions.
- Understands concepts of 'in', 'on', 'under', 'on top of', 'together', 'off', 'away from', 'same'. Gradually using more of these words in speech.
- Gives full name when asked.

Social and relational

- Can wait turn in playing games.
- Shows concern for a crying peer by taking action.
- Helps with simple household tasks.
- Shows affection towards peers without prompting.
- Toilet training in progress.
- Dresses with supervision.

Emotional

- Developing capacity to self-soothe when distressed.
- Shows sympathy, pity, and shame.
- Tries to please.
- Shows fear (e.g., visual fears, heights, sounds, loss of parents, nightmares).

Physical

Sensory

- Handles fragile items carefully.
- Enjoys interesting tactile surfaces.
- Plays with water and sand.
- May experience difficulty with transitions.

Fine motor

- Snips with scissors.
- Traces form such as a cross and copies circle.
- Holds pencil with thumb and forefingers and colours in large forms.
- Plays with toys with moving parts.
- Washes and dries hands.
- Can zip and unzip.
- Eats with fork and spoon.
- Pours from 1 container to another.

Gross motor

- Runs fluidly.
- Pedals a tricycle.
- Catches and kicks a big ball.
- Alternates feet walking upstairs.
- Jumps from step with 2 feet.
- Throws a ball overhand.
- Can walk on tip toes and balance on a single foot for 1 to 5 seconds.

Sleep

- Generally sleeps 10 to 13 hours in a 24-hour period and some children will no longer need daytime naps.
- Many pre-schoolers will have nightmares and night terrors and may want to get into bed with the adult for comfort.
- Night-time bedwetting is common at this stage as many pre-schoolers are no longer wearing nappies overnight.



4 years

Cognitive

- Understands past vs present (e.g., yesterday, today).
- Shows curiosity, may ask endless questions.
- Can attend to a task independently (e.g., drawing).
- Developing interest in letters (e.g., starts to copy letters).
- Matches geometric shapes.
- Counts to 10.
- Waits for turns in games.
- Draws a person with 2 to 4 body parts.

Speech and language

- Speech can be understood by others about 90 per cent of the time.
- Vocabulary is vast (2000+ words), eagerly learns new words quickly and easily.
- Understands concepts 'behind', 'in front', 'around', 'next to', 'beside', 'between'.
- Follows 2- and 3-part instructions.
- Enjoys rhymes and playing with sounds in words.
- Has favourite books and stories that they enjoy hearing repeatedly.
- Able to use some complex sentences when talking. Can tell simple stories.
- Able to report on past events using past tense verbs in sentences.
- Able to use and answer questions starting with 'when' and 'how'.
- Uses words for reasoning, expressing empathy, imaginary play, predicting.

Social and relational

- Has a preferred friend.
- Asks or talks about a caregiver when separated (i.e., holds the other in mind).
- Engages in cooperative play.
- Enjoys dress up play. Plays 'mums and dads'.
- Expresses interests, likes, and dislikes.
- Day time toilet trained, with a few accidents.
- Uses toilet unassisted.
- Washes face, brushes teeth, and dresses self.

Emotional

- Expresses distress or anger with words.
- Conveys emotional experience through pretend play.
- Complies with basic cultural rules for emotional expression.

Physical

Fine motor

- Copies 'plus' sign.
- Begins to copy letters.
- Pours from one container to another, cuts with supervision and mashes own food.
- Uses scissors to cut simple shapes. Attempts to cut on straight line.
- Constructs 3 dimensional designs.
- Manipulates objects within the hand.
- Has established hand dominance.

Gross motor

- Begins to skip.
- Can hop on one foot.
- Throws a large bouncy ball and catches it most of the time.
- Able to ride a tricycle.

Sleep

- Generally sleep 10 to 13 hours in a 24-hour period and some will stop daytime naps.
- Many will have nightmares and night terrors and may want to get into bed with the adult for comfort.
- Night-time bedwetting is common at this stage as many are no longer wearing nappies overnight.

5 years

Cognitive

- Attends to a group activity for 15 minutes.
- Knows function of household objects.
- Copies geometric shapes (e.g., circle, triangle, diamond).
- Can print first name.
- Draws a person with at least 6 body parts.
- Follows simple rules in a game.

Speech and language

- Speech and language can be understood by others all the time, though a few sounds (s, r, th, and blends such as fl) might be in a simplified form.
- Spoken language is usually grammatically correct.
- Complex sentences (with clauses containing 'if', 'because', 'when', 'why', 'so', etc.) are regularly used, especially during storytelling or explanations.
- Storytelling developing well. Should have a beginning, middle and end.
- Identifies the sounds that words start with, rhyming words, aware of print and that written words can be spoken words.
- Early stage of learning to read and write.

Social and relational

- Seeks to please friends.
- Emulates role models, real or imaginary.
- Values rules in social interactions.
- Participates in group activity that requires assuming roles (e.g., 'Simon says').
- Modulated or modifies voice correctly depending on situation or listener (e.g., outside voice, or when talking to babies).
- Is curious about their body and sexuality.

Emotional

- Shows increased confidence associated with greater independence and autonomy.
- Respects peers and their property.

Physical

Fine motor

- Cuts with scissors.
- Completes puzzles up to 20 pieces.
- Manipulates tiny objects in fingertips without dropping.

- Uses 2 hands together in complementary movements.
- Eye hand coordination is becoming refined.
- Colours within line and ties knot in a string following demonstration.

Gross motor

- Hops well for long distances.
- Skips smoothly.
- Rides bike with or without training wheels.
- Catches ball with 2 hands.
- Kicks with accuracy.
- Stands on 1 foot for 8–10 seconds.
- Swings independently on the swing.
- Needs active play and exercise of about 1 hour per day.
- Can hop through hopscotch course.
- Developing good balance and rhythm.

Sleep

- Generally sleep 10 to 13 hours in a 24-hour period and some children may not need daytime naps.
- Pre-schoolers may have nightmares and night terrors and may want to get into bed with the adult for comfort.
- Night-time bedwetting is common at this stage as many are no longer wearing nappies overnight.





Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – 5 years

- Stillness (listening) and deep listening grows relatedness with the Spirit world and Country.
- From relatedness children have both a collective and individual identity.
- As children grow relatedness, there are increase responsibilities to Community, Country and Ancestors.
- Consequences are learnt, not punishment dealt out.
- Exploration and risk taking is encouraged for confidence, self-efficacy and increased relatedness with their environment.
- Personal attributes of 'nurturance' and compassion carry status in Community.



6-7 years

Cognitive

- Able to resist distraction.
- Can print last name.
- Recites days of week and months of year.
- Can solve simple addition and subtraction problems.

Speech and language

- Speech fluent and effective for a range of social and communicative purposes.
- Last residual speech sound errors overcome.
- Literacy acquisition progressing, learning to blend the sounds of the letters into words.
- Storytelling now well-developed with traditional structure – focus, high point, resolution. Passive and complex sentences included. Dialogue reported. Character voices used.

Social and relational

- Friendships are important but may change regularly.
- Shares relevant information to try and influence a listener (e.g., 'Dylan tripped on the branch. Casey did not push him').

Emotional

- Talks about own feelings in retrospect.
- Awareness of and interest in personal success.

Physical

Fine motor

- Can tie shoelaces.
- Uses hand with dexterity and skill to do craft and build things.

Gross motor

- Riding bike unaided.
- Becoming increasingly proficient in games, skills, and sports.
- Run smoothly on balls of feet.

Sleep

- Need between 10 and 11 hours of sleep. If napping occurs, it may be a sign of insufficient night sleep or poor-quality sleep.



8-9 years

Cognitive

- Able to pay attention for longer (approximately 1 hour).
- More deliberate and strategic memory strategies (e.g., grouping and rehearsal).
- Can plan ahead, keep a diary, or make lists, and manage own daily routine.
- Cognitive flexibility begins to develop.
- May work purposefully to improve physical skills.

Speech and language

- Literacy is now well-established. Unfamiliar written words are seen as syllables and sounded out using phonic strategies. Still learning the least common grapheme/phoneme correspondences (e.g., 'strophe' in catastrophe). Reads silently.
- Vocabulary growth occurs through reading, as child already knows most spoken words. Multiple meanings of words and figurative (non-literal) language developing and used effectively for humour or impact.
- Language is used to establish and maintain social status.
- Increased perspective-taking skill allows more successful persuasion.
- Storytelling and oral language reflect the child's understanding of the motivations and emotional states of others.

Social and relational

- Strong need to belong and be part of family and peer relationships.
- Feelings of self-worth come increasingly from peers.
- Able to resolve conflict verbally and know when to seek adult help.
- Enjoys team and competitive sports and games.

Emotional

- May start to compare self with others.

Physical

Fine motor

- Holds pencil, toothbrush, and tools less tensely.

Gross motor

- Improved coordination control and agility.
- Practices physical skills to master them.
- Improved stamina and strength.
- Skilled at large motor movements such as skipping and playing ball games.
- Can manage own daily routines.
- May have accidents due to misjudging abilities e.g., broken arm.
- May work purposefully to improve physical skills.

Sleep

- Need between 10 and 11 hours of sleep. If napping occurs, it may be a sign of insufficient night sleep or poor-quality sleep.



10-11 years

Cognitive

- Hypothesis testing.
- Increased ability to focus attention on required tasks (e.g., ignore distractions).
- Increased ability to effectively switch attention between tasks.
- Rapid development of planning and organisational abilities.
- Beginning of more logical thinking, reasoning and abstract thinking.

Speech and language

- Using language in sophisticated ways, e.g., debating, persuasion, rich stories with complex and embedded episodes related to an overarching theme.
- Most common idioms (figures of speech) understood. Beginning to 'read between the lines'.
- Reading chapter books.
- Language continues to be used to establish and maintain social status.

Social and relational

- Belonging to a group may be important and peers are a significant influence on self-esteem and identity.
- Desire to have opinion sought and respected.
- Interest in popular culture emerges.
- Has collections, may have hobbies.

Emotional

- May experience embarrassment, shame, curiosity, and excitement because of sexual awareness.
- More aware of body (body image and eating problems can emerge).

Physical

- Body changes, including hair growth under the arms and near the genitals, breast development in females and enlargement of the testicles in males.
- Body changes usually start a year or two earlier in girls than boys.

Fine motor

- Good dexterity for crafts and construction with small objects.
- Bilateral coordination for building complex structures.

- Precision and motor planning evident in drawing.
- Motor planning evident in completion of complete puzzles.

Gross motor

- Runs with speed and endurance.
- Throws ball well at distances.
- Catches ball with accuracy.
- Large and fine motor skills become highly coordinated.

Sleep

- Need between 10 and 11 hours of sleep. If napping occurs, it may be a sign of insufficient night sleep or poor-quality sleep.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – 10-11 years



- Increased understanding of responsibility to Country and Kin reinforces relatedness and caring for others (reciprocity).
- Largely interacting and learning from the Kid Mob through observation, play, relatedness, and risk taking.
- Adults indirectly modify behaviours through teasing, tricking and scary stories to encourage norms.
- Learn through experiences, actions and consequences.
- By this age most Aboriginal boys will have completed at least the first stage of law in the form of men's business.



12-14 years

Cognitive

- Continuing to develop capacity for abstract thought.
- Increasing capacity for executive cognitive functions.

Speech and language

- Capable and effective communication skills for most settings.
- Infers implied meaning in texts and conversations.
- Able to give abstract, dictionary-style definitions for word meanings.
- Written grammar and style is more formal and complex than spoken language.
- Sophisticated use of tone of voice to convey meaning, including sarcasm.

Social and relational

- Peers continue to be a significant influence on self-esteem and identity.
- The combination of cognitive development, hormonal changes and multifaceted social stressors may cause increased susceptibility to wide mood swings, strong emotions or feelings and reduced impulse control.
- Legally, the early adolescent remains highly dependent on adult authority.

Emotional

- May experience embarrassment, shame, curiosity, and excitement because of sexual awareness.
- More aware of body (body image and eating problems can emerge).

Physical

- Many girls may start their period at around age 12, on average 2 to 3 years after the onset of breast development.
- Onset of accelerated physical and sexual maturation.
- Accompanying psychosocial adjustment to pubescent changes evokes a pre-occupation with body image.

Sleep

- Total sleep is reduced to between 8.5 and 9.5 hours. May begin to stay up later before feeling tired and may want to sleep in (natural change in sleep timing for adolescents).



15-16 years

Cognitive

- Increasing capacity for executive cognitive functions (i.e., developing and refining higher level thinking skills such as abstract thinking, planning, organisation, attention).

Speech and language

- Sentence length and complexity continues to develop, with writing still more advanced than spoken language.
- Comprehends academic words such as 'evaluate', 'compile', 'contrast'.
- Ambiguous jokes, riddles and irony now understood at a deeper level.

Social and relational

- Language reinforces belonging to social groups (e.g., 'hanging out just talking').
- Maintain more stable relationships with peers and adults.
- Increasing independence from adult guardians, able to provide informed consent.
- Legally able to work in paid employment.

Physical

- Most males will have started their growth spurt and puberty-related changes continue. They may have some voice cracking, as their voices lower. Some develop acne. Accelerated height growth, muscle growth and facial hair.
- Physical changes may be nearly complete for females, and most girls now have regular periods.
- Full development of breasts and auxiliary hair, and decelerated height growth.

Sleep

- Total sleep is reduced to between 8.5 and 9.5 hours. May begin to stay up later before feeling tired and may want to sleep in (natural change in sleep timing for adolescents).



17-18 years

Cognitive

- Logical and abstract thinking is at near adult levels but will continue to develop into the early 20s.

Speech and language

- Persuasive and argumentative skills reach near-adult levels.
- Identifies themes and discusses the language used by others at a higher level.
- Full adult range of grammatical devices and complexity acquired.

Social and relational

- Legally able to leave school (17 years of age or end of year 10).

Emotional

- May show anxiety about transitioning to adult life and responsibilities.

Physical

- Females: physical maturation nearly complete.
- Males: muscle and hair growth may continue.

Sleep

- Total sleep is reduced to between 8.5 and 9.5 hours. May begin to stay up later before feeling tired and may want to sleep in (natural change in sleep timing for adolescents).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principles – 17-18 years

- Increasing connectedness to Dreaming, Country, Community and Kin through ceremony, initiations, responsibility and reciprocity.



This guide draws upon evidence in many works, including these key references

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Useful online child development resources

Raising Children

Australian Government parenting website includes advice about many areas of childhood development:
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Florida State University, College of Medicine, Autism Institute

First Words Project – social communication skills that precede the first words and how to help:
www.firstwordsproject.com/about-16by16/

Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities

Child Development and Trauma Guide:
www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/child-development-and-trauma-guide

Sleep Health Foundation

Sleep for Children, Adolescents and Parents:
www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/sleep-categories/children-adolescents-parents



Healing Childhood Trauma

www.taketwo.org.au