

# Introducing It: Using the Early Learning Guidelines to Track Development for Assessment

Center for Early Education  
and Development

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

*This tip sheet summarizes what developmental milestones and early learning guidelines are, their importance in early childhood education, resources for understanding typical child development, and what to do if there are concerns about a child's development.*

## RECALL IT

In the *Introducing It: An Introduction to the Authentic Assessment Cycle* we discussed:

- Authentic Assessment is a recommended, evidence-based practice that allows adults to get a holistic understanding of a particular child and their development.
- The Authentic Assessment Cycle (Observe/Document/Plan/Teach/Evaluate) is an iterative process that helps practitioners continuously collect data through various methods, analyze that data, plan and implement changes to their instructional practices in the support of individual students and the collective.
- The continuous observation and assessment of children throughout their early development across environments allows teachers to change their instructional strategies to meet the needs of all children within their care. Additionally, collecting assessment data is one of the first steps in the identification of children who may be experiencing developmental delays and need additional support.

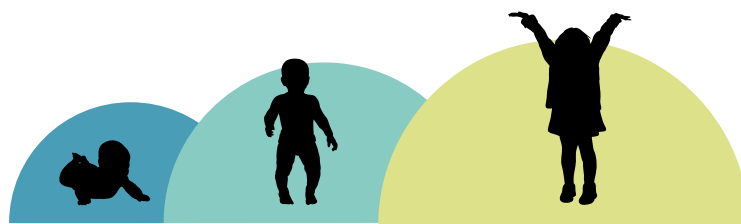
## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

In order to effectively implement the Authentic Assessment Cycle into daily practice, first we need to understand typical development milestones. How else will we know what to expect behaviorally, academically, and physically from the children in our care? How will we know when a child is progressing typically or when there might be a concern for a child who is not following typical developmental patterns?

So what is a developmental milestone?

Through years of observation and research, experts have come to understand that brains developing typically take a similar path, with expectations during certain periods of life. During early childhood, development happens so rapidly and there are a lot of expectations (or milestones) to notice and enjoy, such as smiling, singing, clapping, and learning to move in various ways. It can be overwhelming to monitor development in these early years, because children learn and grow so quickly. Using milestones as a general guide can be helpful to teachers, parents, administrators, and anyone else working closely with young children.

A few examples of movement/physical development milestones from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are:



~2 Months

A child should be able to hold up their head when on their tummy.

~1 Year

A child should be able to walk while holding onto furniture.

~3 Years

A child should be able to put on some clothes, like a jacket.

Are these milestones hard and fast? No. And these milestones may look different within different cultures. As the CDC states, "Children develop at their own pace, so it's impossible to tell exactly when a child will learn a given skill. However, the developmental milestones give a general idea of the changes to expect as a child gets older" (CDC, 2023a).

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These milestones are helpful in setting expectations of children, identifying what skills and knowledge they should be learning next, and identifying possible areas of concern.

**“The first years of life are critical for later outcomes. Young children have an innate desire to learn. That desire can be supported or undermined by early experiences. High-quality early childhood education can promote intellectual, language, physical, social, and emotional development, creating school readiness and building a foundation for later academic and social competence. By defining the desired content and outcomes of young children’s education, early learning standards can lead to greater opportunities for positive development and learning in these early years.”**

**(NAEYC, 2002)**

## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES RESOURCES

If this all sounds like a lot to learn and know, don’t worry. There are many resources available that delineate developmental milestones.

A great place to start is through the recently updated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early” campaign. Their Milestones page (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>) has descriptions for each stage of development, including many videos. They have a printable checklist in many languages. They have even developed a Milestone Tracker Mobile App to use on your phone.

All 50+ states and US territories also have resources available for children ages 3-5 and almost all have resources available for children ages birth-3 (CCTAN, 2016). For example, the Minnesota Department of Education has the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) Learning Domains (<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/highquality/ind/domain/>), including:

1. Social and Emotional Development
2. Approaches to Learning
3. Language, Literacy and Communication
4. The Arts
5. Social Systems (Cognitive)
6. Physical and Movement Development
7. Mathematics (Cognitive)
8. Scientific Thinking (Cognitive)

To find information from your location, open a browser window. Enter your state and then “early learning guidelines”. You should start to zero in on what is available.

## DEFINING IT

### Developmental Monitoring

“Observes how your child grows and changes overtime and whether your child meets the typical developmental milestones in playing, learning, speaking, behaving, and moving” (CDC, 2023b, para.1).

### Developmental Milestones

“Things most children can do by a certain age” (CDC, n.d., p. 13).

### Approaches to Learning Domain

“Learning how to learn and manage their learning” (MDE, 2017, p. 11).

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## The Arts Domain

“Children are developing skills in the arts that allow them to explore a variety of ways to be creative and to express themselves” (MDE, 2017, p. 18).

## Cognitive Milestones

“How children learn new things and solve problems. It includes how children explore their environment to figure things out” (CDC, n.d., p. 15).

## Language/Communication Domain

“How children express their needs and share what they are thinking, as well as understand what is said to them” (CDC, n.d., p. 15).

## Movement/Physical Development Milestones

“How children use their bodies. It includes many milestones parents excitedly wait for” (CDC, n.d., p. 16).

## Social/Emotional Domain

“How children interact with others and show emotion” (CDC, n.d., p. 14).

## DIVING INTO IT

**For additional information on this topic,**

Check out the CDC's Milestone Tracker Mobile App:

<https://ceed.umn.edu/online-courses/managing-challenging-behavior/>

Refer to Help Me Grow's MN Milestones: <https://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/DevelopMilestone/index.html>

Please visit CEED's website: <http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed>

If you are wondering about the difference between screenings, assessment, and evaluation, or what to do if you believe your child or a child in your care is experiencing a developmental delay, be on the lookout for upcoming tip sheets on these topics on CEED's website.

## REFERENCES

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