This tip sheet defines developmental milestones and early learning guidelines as well as describing their importance in early childhood education. It also gives resources for understanding typical child development, and what to do if there are concerns about a child's development.

RECALL IT

In *Introducing It: The Authentic Assessment Cycle and Its Role in Early Childhood Education*, we learned:

- 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. In this process, practitioners continuously collect data using various methods. They then analyze that data. Then they plan and implement changes to their instructional practices to help students individually and collectively.
- Authentic assessment allows teachers to change their instructional strategies to meet the needs of all the children in their care.
- Collecting assessment data is also one of the first steps in identifying children who have developmental delays or need additional support.

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

To implement the Authentic Assessment Cycle, we need to understand typical development. 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 a child is not following typical developmental patterns?

That is what developmental milestones are for. Develomental milestones are skills and abilities that children typically gain within a certain age window.

During early childhood, development happens very rapidly. Children quickly gain new skills, such as smiling, clapping, and walking, that child development researchers have identified as developmental milestones. These milestones can give us an idea of what to expect as children grow. They can be helpful as a general guide for teachers, parents, administrators, and anyone who works closely with young children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created a set of evidence-based developmental milestones that are widely used. Here are examples of the CDC's movement/physical development milestones:
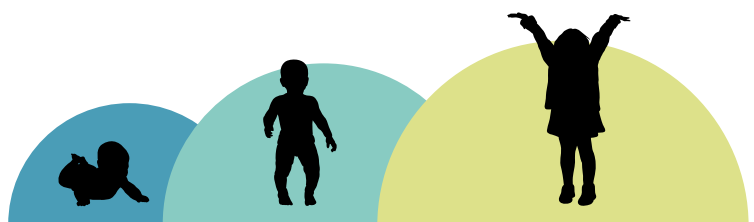
~2 Months
A child should be able to hold up their head when on their tummy.

~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.

These milestones are not hard and fast. And they may look different in 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).

Developmental milestones are helpful in setting our expectations, identifying the skills and knowledge that children may learn next, and identifying possible areas of concern.

The CDC has **great resources** about developmental milestones, including videos, a Milestone Tracker app, and a printable checklist that's available in many languages.

> **"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."**
>
> **(National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002)**

EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

All 50+ states and U.S. territories have created early learning guidelines for people who work with young children. These guidelines describe things children ages 3-5 should know and be able to do. Most states also have early learning guidelines for children from birth to age 3 (CCTAN, 2016).

The Minnesota Department of Education calls its early learning guidelines Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). The ECIPs sort children's skills and knowledge into eight "domains." The domains include:

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

DEFINING IT

Developmental monitoring

"…observes how your child grows and changes over time and whether your child meets the typical developmental milestones in playing, learning, speaking, behaving, and moving" (CDC, 2023b).

Developmental milestones

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

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).

Movement/physical development milestones

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

Examples of early learning domains:

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).

Social/Emotional Domain

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

Approaches to Learning Domain

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

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).

DIVING INTO IT

For additional information on this topic:

Please visit our website: **ceed.umn.edu**

Take a look at the CDC's resources on developmental milestones: **z.umn.edu/cdc_milestones**

Refer to Help Me Grow's MN Milestones: **z.umn.edu/hmg_milestones**

Read about CEED's work with the Minnesota Department of Education to update Minnesota's ECIPs: **z.umn.edu/ceed_ecips**

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