

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD

# 0-1 YEARS

MILESTONES OF  
DEVELOPMENT

Big muscle movement  
Small muscle movement  
Talking and understanding  
Social  
Thinking



**Act for kids**

[actforkids.com.au](http://actforkids.com.au)



## Introduction

Parenting a baby through its first year of life is an experience of great wonder. The realisation that you are their world comes quickly. Your heart will jump at their special smile, reserved just for you. During this year your baby will journey from lying, to sitting, to crawling and potentially grabbing that favourite ornament from the coffee table at lightning speed. 'Safety first' takes on a whole new meaning with a mobile baby in the house.

Navigating sleepless nights while baby is teething, hungry, grumpy, or just wanting your soothing presence will be a task like no other. The reward comes with the awareness that baby communicates in a myriad of ways with you – and you understand!

This booklet is part of the *Understanding your child* series, published by Act for Kids.

For more information about child development, or to get additional copies, use the contact details on the back of this booklet.

Copyright © 2003 Child Development Network. Reproduced with permission. The milestone checklists provided in this booklet are to assist with monitoring your child's development. The majority of children will achieve these milestones by the time they reach the age mentioned. All children develop at different rates. Some children are slower than others (developmentally delayed) but catch up with time. Other children, however, may have an underlying problem that causes their delayed development, and they may not catch up. It is important for these children to get as much treatment (early intervention) as possible. So if you are concerned about any aspect of your child's development, see your doctor. If in doubt, it is better to have your concerns checked than to 'wait and see'.

# Big muscle movement

## By 3 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- lift their head when lying on their tummy.
- lift their head when pulled to a sitting position.
- kick vigorously.
- hold their back firm when held in a sitting position.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- any differences between the right and left side of their body (in strength, movement or muscle tone).
- their head falls back when pulled to a sitting position.

## By 6 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- lift their head and chest off the ground when lying on their tummy.
- roll over side to side.
- sit with support and a straight back.
- bear weight on their legs, stand with support.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- can't lift their head and shoulders when lying on their tummy.
- can't roll over.
- they have a floppy back when held in a sitting position.
- any differences between the right and left side of their body (in strength, movement or muscle tone).

# Big muscle movement

## By 9 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- sit without support.
- get into a sitting position.
- crawl, or make crawling attempts.
- begin to stand up, holding on.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they can't sit without support.
- no crawling motion.
- unable to hold their bodyweight or push up through legs in a standing position.
- any differences between the right and left side of their body (in strength, movement or muscle tone).

## By 12 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- stand holding on, walk holding on.
- crawl well.
- pull themselves up to a standing position.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they can't stand holding on.
- no crawling or bottom-shuffling.
- any differences between the right and left side of their body (in strength, movement or muscle tone).

# Small muscle movement

## By 3 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- follow objects from side to side with their eyes.
- hold objects briefly in their hand.
- look at their own hand.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they don't follow objects with their eyes.
- persistent fisting of hands (doesn't let go of objects).

## By 6 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- reach for objects with each arm and hand.
- hold objects with whole hand.
- transfer object from hand to hand.
- hold an object in each hand.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- an obvious difference between their use of right and left arms.
- persistent fisting of hands (doesn't let go of objects).



# Small muscle movement

## By 9 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- point with their index finger.
- hold objects using their thumb and fingers.
- bang objects together (one in each hand).

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- unable to use their index finger in isolation (like poking or pointing).

## By 12 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- pick up objects using the tip of their thumb and index finger.
- grasp a pencil and start to scribble.
- pick up smaller objects well.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- no clear use of the index finger to point or poke or with thumb to pick up objects.



# Talking and understanding

## By 3 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- cry.
- take turns in vocalising (making voice sounds).
- make two or more speech sounds.
- laugh.
- respond to sound.
- search for sounds with their eyes.
- respond to their mother's voice.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- no turn-taking or variety in sounds.
- poor or no response to sound.

## By 6 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- make four or more distinct sounds (vowels and consonants).
- laugh in response to something.
- search for sound by turning their head.
- change behaviour when listening to sound and human conversations.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- not much variety in sounds being made.
- limited social use of sound (not responsive, no turn-taking, no laughter).
- not interested in sound or able to turn to sound with their head and eyes.
- they don't change behaviour in response to sound.

# Talking and understanding

## By 9 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- babble (vowels and consonants together).
- put two syllables together into babble words.
- babble phrases of three or four syllables.
- perhaps say 'mama' or 'dada'.
- imitate speech sounds.
- respond to their own name.
- show interest in listening to people talking to each other.
- listen to soft sounds.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- limited variety of sound.
- limited or no babble.
- no attempts to imitate sound.
- they don't seem to know their own name.

## By 12 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- say two clear words.
- shake their head for 'no'.
- babble short sentences of six or more sounds.
- babble frequently when alone (talk to themselves).
- listen with more interest to familiar words.
- understand 'no'.
- understand individual words, like 'drink'.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- no single words.
- no babbled phrases that 'sound' like normal language.
- no interest in language or communication.
- no recognition of individual words.





# Social

## By 3 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- enjoy being touched or picked up.
- smile.
- recognise their mother.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- no preference to mother or other people.
- they don't look directly at people's eyes.

## By 6 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- enjoy and respond to play.
- anticipate touch or being lifted.
- turn head to people.
- drink from a cup (with an adult holding it).
- resist toys being taken away.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they show no preference to mother or other people.
- they don't look people directly in the eye.
- no responsive smiling or laughing.
- negative or over-reaction to touch.



# Social

## By 9 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- display fear or unease around strangers.
- feed themselves (a biscuit or something similar).
- enjoy playing games with people, like peek-a-boo.
- try to get toys out of reach.
- play with a cup or spoon.
- react to themselves in the mirror.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they don't behave differently between familiar people and strangers.
- no interest in playing with people.
- prefers to play alone.

## By 12 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- play ball with a stranger.
- point at wanted objects.
- play more complex games, like pat-a-cake.
- make the first move to show affection.
- wave 'bye-bye'.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- lack of awareness of strangers.
- prefer to play alone.
- show no pleasure when parents give affection.
- no awareness of what to do socially (waving, or noticing if someone walks in the room).

# Thinking

## By 3 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- make active movements.
- put their hands to their mouth.
- show an active, visual interest in the world and people.
- have times of being alert.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they're inactive, detached (limited display of emotion).

## By 6 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- resist objects being taken out of their hands.
- examine what is in their hand.
- show clear pleasure with new objects and experiences.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- not interested in what is in their hand.
- not interested in people.

## By 9 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- look at and feel objects in their hand.
- put objects down and pick them up.
- enjoy exploring and moving around.
- search for objects after they have fallen.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they can't tell the difference between new experiences and familiar ones.
- no difference in responses to strangers and familiar people.

## By 12 months

### ✓ An average child can:

- actively explore – lifting lids, looking around.
- copy actions.
- find hidden objects, like a block under a cup.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- forgets objects or loses interest as soon as they are out of view.

Act for Kids is a for-purpose organisation that delivers evidence-led professional therapy and support services to young people and their families.

We help keep kids safe, heal from trauma and lead happy lives through professional counselling, parenting programs, resources and advocacy.

For more information, visit **actforkids.com.au** or phone **1300 228 000**.

## Child development resources

[www.bubhub.com.au](http://www.bubhub.com.au)

[www.cd.net.au](http://www.cd.net.au)

[www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

For more information please call 1300 228 000  
or visit our website [actforkids.com.au](http://actforkids.com.au)



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