

Important milestones in child development

The table below lists the ages by which most children will have gained certain skills. If your child has not reached these milestones by these ages, it is advisable to talk your health visitor or GP.

	PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL	COMMUNICATION	PHYSICAL	THINKING
6 MONTHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds eye contact briefly (5 seconds or more) Recognises and is most responsive to main carer; face brightens, activity increases when familiar carer appears Shows emotional responses to other people's emotions – for example, smiles when smiled at and becomes distressed if hears another child crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turns eyes and/or head towards you when you speak Reacts by smiling, looking and moving when you interact Vocalises back when talked to (making own sounds) especially to familiar adult and when a smiling face is used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes smooth movements with arms and legs, which gradually become more controlled Explores hands and fingers – for example, watches them, presses hands together, clasps and unclasps hands Picks up and explores objects – for example, by holding to mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows interest in new experiences – for example, when you show a new toy Repeats actions that have an effect – for example, kicking or batting a mobile to create movement including actions to make a sound again, for example, shaking a rattle Shows anticipation and enjoyment of familiar caring routines and simple games – for example, sucks or licks lips in response to sounds of preparation for feeding or gets excited upon seeing spoon or familiar toy
12 MONTHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows attachment to special people – for example, by being distressed when they are separated, staying close and showing affection Follows with gaze when an adult directs attention to an object by looking and pointing – for example, when an adult points to a bus and says "Look at the bus" and your child looks at the bus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to babble by repeating a series of the same sounds – for example, 'ba-ba-ba', 'ma-ma-ma' Points to objects and people, using index finger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When sitting, can lean forward to pick up small toys Actively cooperates with nappy changing – for example, lies still, helps hold legs up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches toy being hidden and tries to find it Struggles to get objects that are out of reach and pulls a mat towards them to make a toy or object come closer
18 MONTHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses other person to help achieve a goal – for example, to get an object that's out of reach or activate a wind-up toy Is aware of other people's feelings – for example, looks concerned if hears crying, or looks excited if hears a familiar happy voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses approximately five different words without any help Recognises and will identify many objects and pictures (by pointing) when asked questions – for example, "Where's the ball?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes first few steps; feet wide apart, uneven steps, arms raised for balance Signals wet or soiled nappy or pants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages in simple pretend play with soft toys – for example, hugs and kisses teddy or pretends to be asleep by covering self with a blanket and closing eyes Matches shape of piece to hole – for example in a shape sorter
2½ YEARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a familiar adult as a secure base from which to explore independently in new environments – for example, goes away to play and interact with others, but returns for a cuddle if becomes anxious Demonstrates sense of self as an individual – for example, wants to do things independently, says "No" to adult, and so on Shows understanding of some rules and routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says two words together - for example teddy sleeping, more juice Recognises and joins in with songs and actions – for example, 'The Wheels on the Bus' Says three words together – for example, 'go park today', 'big red bus' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starts to help with dress and hygiene routines Holds pencil between thumb and two fingers no longer using whole hand grasp Shows control in holding and using hammers, books and mark-making tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can organise and categorise objects – for example, putting all red things and all blue things in separate piles Operates mechanical toys – for example, turns the knob on a wind-up toy, pulls back on a friction car, pushes button to open flap Completes simple puzzle board
3½ YEARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises self in mirror or photo – for example, if looks in mirror and sees dirt or food on face, tries to wipe it off, or points to self in photo when asked Shows independence in selecting and carrying out activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listens eagerly to short stories, is able to talk about particular parts of them and requests favourites over and over again Uses a range of tenses – for example, 'play', 'playing', 'will play' and 'played' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catches a large ball Washes and dries hands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is more organised, gathering together the toys they want to play with before starting play – for example, getting the doll and the tea set before starting to play tea-parties or getting the train and tracks and setting them out before playing trains Draws person with head and one or two other features or parts
5 YEARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is curious about others and can adapt behaviour to fit in with different events and social situations – for example, removing shoes and socks before going on slide after seeing others doing this Works as part of a group or class, taking turns and sharing fairly, understanding that there need to be agreed values and codes of behaviour for groups of people, including adults and children, to work together harmoniously 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses longer sentences to link more than one idea, for example "We walked to the park and we watched the ducks" Can pick out the first sound in a word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliably dry and clean during the day Dresses and undresses independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentrates and listens for more than ten minutes in adult-led activities that they enjoy Shows flexibility in trying different ways of tackling problems