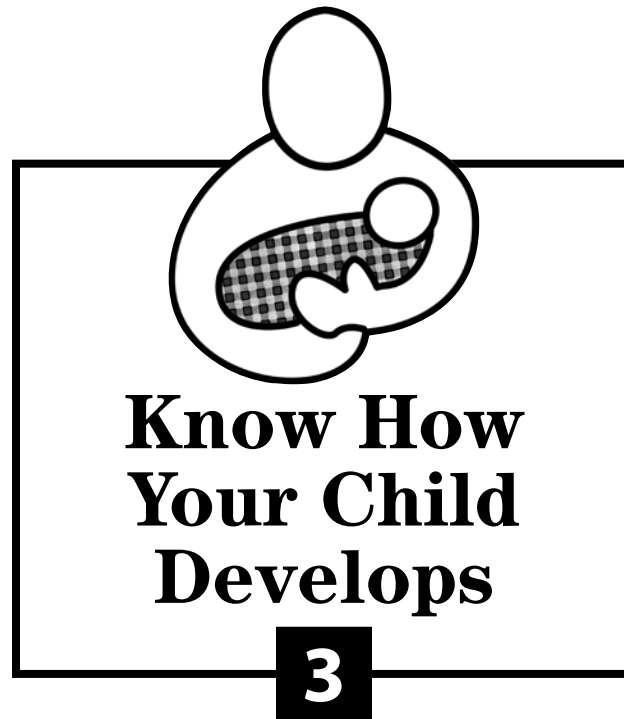


# Keys to Great Parenting

*Fun and Learning with Your Baby or Toddler*

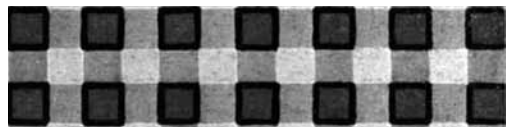


Cooperative Extension Service  
University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture

*in partnership with*

Kentucky Extension Homemakers Association

Cooperative Extension Program  
Kentucky State University

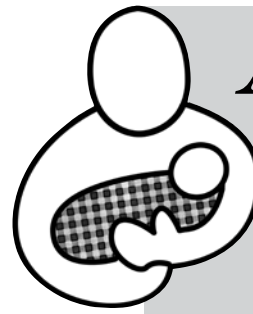


# Know How Your Child Develops

**B**abies and toddlers grow and change at an amazing rate! Their weak muscles become stronger as they learn to roll over, sit, and walk. At first they coo, gurgle, babble, and cry in distress. Then they begin to show interest, smile, and laugh. Before you know it, they are putting words together, taking turns, and learning to share.

Unless a child has a severe disability, early growth and development follow predictable natural laws, which is true for young children all over the world. But every child also grows and learns skills at his or her own pace.

There are lots of interesting things to learn about development, and this third key—***Know How Your Child Develops***—will give you three rules about how children grow and four ways in which they grow. It also suggests activities to get in tune with your child's new abilities and help your child grow. The developmental growth chart inserted in this booklet gives average ages for some of the more important changes.



*A window of opportunity is a limited period of time—a few weeks or months—when it is especially easy for a baby to develop a certain ability.*

## Three Rules about How Children Grow

**1 Changes occur in an orderly way.** For example, babies first learn to hold their heads up, then roll over, and then to sit. Once they are able to sit up alone, they do not forget how to do that. They naturally move on to creeping, crawling, and standing.

**2 Development happens at different rates for each child.** There is a wide age range in which normally developing children gain new skills. A child may be further along in one area than another. For example, an 18-month-old may be putting lots of energy into walking and running but may not yet be talking much.

**3 There are windows of opportunity during the first three years for a child to learn many basic abilities.** A window of opportunity is a limited period of time—a few weeks or months—when it is especially easy for a baby to develop a certain ability. At these times, connections between brain cells get stronger and multiply.

You can tell when your baby has entered one of these periods because he begins to do new things. You can help him open his windows of opportunity during these special, important times. As you play and care for him, notice what he especially likes so you can help supply certain kinds of learning experiences.

Refer to the developmental growth chart. It will list many behaviors that usually appear by certain months. It can be your guide to your child's windows of opportunity.

*If you think your baby or toddler is developing very differently from what is expected, contact a health care professional. You may also want to talk with a child development specialist in Kentucky's First Steps Program by calling 1-800-442-0087.*

## Four Ways Children Grow

There are four key areas of development. They are:

- 1 Physical:** growing bigger and stronger and coordinating movements.
- 2 Social:** getting along with and communicating with others.
- 3 Emotional:** recognizing, expressing, and managing feelings.
- 4 Intellectual:** learning through the senses, remembering information, solving problems, and thinking creatively.

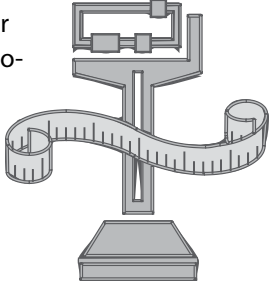
The brain manages the four areas of development at the same time. For example, as your baby's eyes focus better and her muscles get stronger, she can pick up a small ball and throw it toward you (physical development), smile and watch you toss it back to her (social development), gurgle with delight (emotional development), and throw it again in a different way to see what you and the ball will do (intellectual development).



**C***an I make my child smarter? You cannot make your child smarter by hurrying him along and pushing him to perform. Each child follows his own built-in timetable for developing. Pushing babies beyond their natural abilities frustrates and stresses them. Recent studies show that high stress over long periods may have a negative effect on a child's brain chemistry and ability to learn later on.*

## Physical Development

Babies and toddlers are active learners. Their large and small muscles must learn to work together in coordination with the brain. To grow strong and healthy, they need free, safe space for moving, enough rest, and the right kind of food and playthings.

- Measure your child's height and weight and keep a record of it. Take him to a health care professional for regular checkups and up-to-date immunizations. Obtain information from your health care professional about nutritious foods to help your child grow.
- 
- Watch your child's ability to use the large muscles in his body, arms, and legs. Depending on his age, is he able to roll over, sit steadily, creep or crawl, walk, run, jump, and climb? Is he learning to throw, catch, and kick balls?
  - Have fun playing with your child while you help him develop these movement skills. Both girls and boys need to practice them. The first five years are the window of opportunity for mastering these basic skills, which are needed for the sports your child will want to play during the school years.
  - Give your baby or toddler many chances to take hold of objects with his whole hand and later, his thumb and fingers together. (To help prevent choking, be sure toys and food items are large enough that they cannot go through a toilet paper tube.)
  - For a toddler, shape-sorting toys, short books with stiff cardboard pages, wooden puzzles with knobs, large crayons, and paper for drawing help with coordination of small muscles.
  - Let your older baby feed himself soft finger foods, such as cooked carrot strips or pieces of banana. Give your toddler a spoon that fits his hand grasp. Let him use it with pudding or other soft foods, even though he may spill some food. Remember, it takes plenty of practice to use a spoon!

## Social Development

Your baby wants to be sociable from birth. Her wiggles, smiles, and even her crying tell you that she counts on you and other family members for love and learning. She needs to know she can trust you to be there for her as she explores.

Babies and toddlers of all ages learn how to be friendly when you speak and listen to their sounds. Pay close attention while playing with them, and include them in friendly get-togethers with other children.

- Find out what sounds, movements, and playthings your baby likes. Provide them often.
- Encourage your baby to help you to diaper, feed, or dress her.
- Show your baby a small, unbreakable mirror or hang one in her crib. Play games naming body parts and movements while looking with her into the mirror. Playfully say "I see you in the mirror! Who do you see?"
- Show her photos of herself and talk about how she has grown and changed.
- Supply playthings that show differences in skin colors, ages, and cultures, such as dolls, toys, and storybooks. It is fun to help children learn and celebrate how people are both different and the same.
- Help your child talk out problems rather than hitting, screaming, or biting. Give her words to explain what she wants: "Melissa, say to Joe, 'I would like a turn with the bulldozer.'"

## Emotional Development

Emotions are a natural part of being human. As we grow older, we gradually learn to recognize and handle our emotional reactions, or *feelings*, to people and things happening around us.

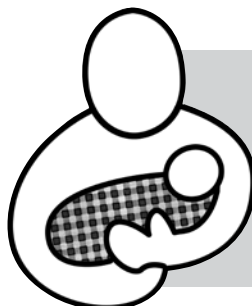
Babies and toddlers show their feelings differently depending on their age and emotional makeup, or *temperament*. We can help them learn how to recognize, express, and manage feelings by understanding more about their temperaments.

Temperament partly determines how babies and toddlers express feelings, even from their earliest days. Researchers Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess have noticed three basic temperament types. Please note that many children and adults are combinations of the three types. **Each type is normal and OK!**

**1** **The flexible, calm, easygoing child** usually finds it easy to get used to new situations and people; makes friends quickly; has regular eating, sleeping, napping, and toileting routines; and may hide deep emotions.

### If you have a flexible, calm, easygoing child:

- Pay close attention to face and body expressions for clues to interests and feelings.
- Encourage him to speak up for his rights.
- Be aware that toddlers with this temperament can be overlooked if they have a more demanding brother or sister.
- Set aside special time for playing with him.



*Babies and toddlers show their feelings differently depending on their age and emotional makeup, or temperament.*

**2 The energetic, intense, enthusiastic, moody child** has a fun-loving outlook on life; is usually on the go; has irregular habits of sleeping, eating, or toileting; and is sensitive to loud sounds, sudden movements, and too much activity at one time. A toddler with this temperament may resort to strong crying or to temper tantrums when frustrated or surprised.

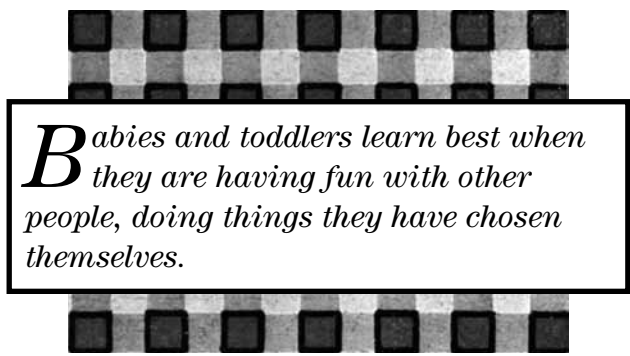
**If you have an energetic, intense, enthusiastic, moody child:**

- Stay patient, calm, and pleasant. Your child's behavior is normal for him.
- Give a clear notice before a change in routine and make the next activity sound like fun.
- Provide plenty of chances for active play, but also offer quiet play and rest time.
- Limit the number of unusual sights and sounds he is exposed to at one time.
- Pick a few reasonable limits to enforce. Make the house as child-proof as possible.
- Be consistent, matter of fact, and firm in enforcement of limits if your child is a toddler.
- Calmly wait out tantrums. Avoid scolding, shaming, and physical punishment.

**3 The cautious, quiet, thoughtful child** may be hesitant to try new things, such as foods, clothes, or toys. As a toddler, he may stay close to parents, other family members, or familiar caregivers until he feels at home with strange places and people. He will usually get used to new situations if he is permitted to adapt at his own pace.

**If you have a cautious, quiet, thoughtful child:**

- Listen respectfully and patiently to his feelings.
- Stay close by until he is ready to move out on his own.
- When he is entering a new situation, step back but remain within sight until you are sure he is comfortable. Tell him good-by if you must leave; avoid sneaking out.
- Patiently encourage new experiences and foods without pushing.



## Intellectual Development

Intellectual development generally means thinking, remembering, using language, solving problems, and coming up with new ideas. Parents and other family members can help babies and toddlers learn by understanding more about the ways their brains work at different ages. They can also stay close by to encourage and to lend a helping hand when needed.

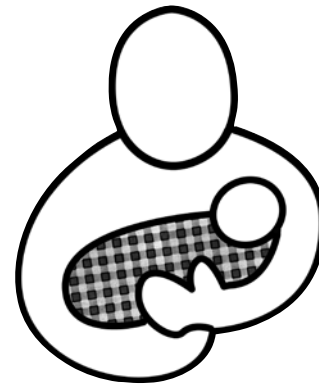
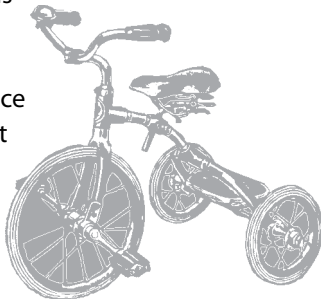
**The first year:** Before they can speak, babies are constantly in motion as they take in information and solve problems through their five senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. Adding new information from their senses to what they already know strengthens the connections of their brain cells.

**The second and third years:** Babies become toddlers as they begin to walk and talk. They still depend on their five senses and lots of movement to learn new things. However, as they start to speak, toddlers are better able to remember ways they solved problems in the past.

They also learn to explain to others what they need and have more strength and more eye-hand coordination. They can go get what they want, and they can think about solving problems by making changes in the ideas they already have. Babies and toddlers learn best when they are having fun with other people, doing things they have chosen themselves.

**Adults and older children help young children's minds develop by:**

- smiling, cuddling, singing, and playing.
- reading favorite stories to them often, daily if possible.
- giving them lots of chances to move around and explore in safe places.
- using words to name things.
- providing playthings and tasks that are just a little bit more advanced than what they are doing at the moment. An example is encouraging a 2-year-old to learn to ride a tricycle with pedals once she becomes an expert on the kiddie car.
- helping them solve a problem when they are about to give up.
- playing make-believe with older toddlers to help their creativity, imagination, and ability to solve problems.



*Your child is a one-of-a-kind miracle. Knowing how he develops enables you to be a more appreciative, understanding, and effective parent. The time and caring you give him is a priceless gift—a gift that will shape his entire future. Remember, the imprint of the early years lasts forever, and your love makes all the difference.*

---

This publication provides information about good parenting. Readers are encouraged to use it for education but not as a substitute for other professional advice.

---

Original edition was prepared by Carole Gnatuk, Ed.D., Child Development Specialist, and Sam Quick, Ph.D., Human Development and Family Relations Specialist, Emeritus. Contact for current revised edition is Carole Gnatuk, Ed.D., [cgnatuk@email.uky.edu](mailto:cgnatuk@email.uky.edu).

Art used in this publication © 1999-2000 [www.arttoday.com](http://www.arttoday.com)

## A Final Word about Development

This booklet will help you enjoy your baby or toddler at every age and stage. The most important skills to remember are those that you already have:

- Watch your child with fascination to see changes happening.
- Enjoy and celebrate each day with your child.
- Respond to your child with smiles and words.
- Get other family members involved in caring and playing with your child.
- Be patient! Sometimes babies and toddlers seem to backtrack, but not for long. Your child will continue to develop.

## References

- Berk, L. E. (2009). *Child development* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Brazelton, T. B. (2006). *Touchpoints: Your child's emotional and behavioral development* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Chess, S. and Thomas, A. (1996). *Temperament: Theory and practice*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Fogel, A. (2009). *Infancy: Infant, family and society* (5th edition). Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan Educational Publishing.
- Greenspan, S. I. (2000). *Building healthy minds*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Lieberman, A. F. (1995). *The emotional life of the toddler*. New York: The Free Press.
- Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the brain*. New York: Families and Work Institute.

## Keys to Great Parenting Web Site

Check out our Web site at <<http://www.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/keys/>>.

## Sponsored by:

COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION  
SERVICE



Family and Consumer Sciences

4-H/Youth Development

UK Children, Youth and Families at Risk Project

Kentucky Extension Homemakers Association



Cooperative Extension Program,  
Kentucky State University

UK Department of Family Studies,  
School of Human Environmental Sciences

in collaboration with the Division of  
Early Childhood Development,  
Kentucky Department of Education



Kentucky Invests in Developing Success

## **Know How Your Child Develops**

This publication is No. 3 in a seven-part series on fun and learning with your baby or toddler, an educational program based on seven keys to unlocking your child's wonderful abilities:

- 1 Care for Yourself
- 2 Cuddle, Talk, and Read with Your Child
- 3 Know How Your Child Develops
- 4 Be Playful with Your Child
- 5 Show Your Child the World
- 6 Teach Self-Control
- 7 Practice Health and Safety

