

Understanding Your Children's Developmental Stages

The one inescapable fact about children is that they are constantly changing. Physically, mentally and emotionally, our children are developing every day. While every child has his or her own unique developmental pattern, there are certain developmental "themes" that seem to apply to many, if not most, children. Understanding your child's developmental stages can go a long way towards understanding and meeting your child's needs in the most positive way.

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Here are a few developmental issues that might be impacting your child. Remember, these are just general ideas of things to be mindful of, and they may or may not apply to the particular human being who is YOUR child.

Infancy:

Babies do not have language to communicate, so they communicate their needs through other means. Often, this means crying when they need something, or are feeling distressed. Remember there is NEVER a negative motive to a baby's behaviour. A baby cries because he needs something and it is our wonderful opportunity as parents to be there to provide what our baby needs. Just as older children and adults are sometimes upset and are not aware of any "reason", babies sometimes just feel upset. Learning to hold your baby and just be with her while she is crying is a beautiful thing and can help us grow past our own need to "fix it" or "make her stop".

The Terrific Twos:

Historically, parents have called this stage "the terrible two's" because their children won't do what they are told. Actually, this refusal to follow instructions is a healthy and normal developmental phase, called "oppositional behaviour". Around this age children realize they are actually separate people from their parents, and that just because Mum tells them to do something doesn't mean they actually have to. What an exciting discovery! And whenever humans discover a new ability, they love to practice it. That's why your two year old might do the opposite of whatever you ask - not because he is "naughty", not because he doesn't love you and not because you aren't a wonderful parent. It's happening because it is normal and healthy.

Latency:

We consider the ages beyond toddler, but before pre-teen, as "latency" and this is usually thought of as a relatively quiet time of development. One thing to watch out for is caretaking behavior. Sometimes a 6-10 year old will feel she is responsible for Mum and Dad's happiness, or for taking care of younger siblings. This pattern is seen most strongly when parents are having difficulty in their relationships, or when they are separated. As parents, we want to make sure our children don't feel they need to take care of us. That role reversal is unhealthy, and children cannot and be responsible for making parents happy. Their job is to be children; our job is to take care of our own happiness.

