

**A SUMMARY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT:
SOCIAL, COGNITIVE, AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT
&
IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTING PLANS AND ACCESS SCHEDULES**

1. INFANT DEVELOPMENT: BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS

Overall tasks:

- Develop attachments
 - Infants move from indiscriminant responsiveness to people to greater discrimination
 - Attachments may be to more than one person
 - Parents promote a "secure attachment" by being responsive to the child's needs
 - A secure attachment allows the child to develop emotional security and comfortably explore their environment
- Gradually gain control over motor skills
- Develop beginning ability to regulate arousal and affect

Language and Communication:

- Vocalizing and Babbling (4 – 6 months)
- Gestural communication via looking and pointing (8 – 9 months)
- Speaks first words (9 – 12 months)

Cognitive Development:

- Beginning awareness of connections between past and present
- Developing object permanence – infant is beginning to keep an object in mind even though it is no longer in sight
- Following simple directions
- Imitative learning

Social Development:

- Sense of self begins to develop based on feelings of self-efficacy with positive sense of self strongly related to responsive care giving
- Self-esteem begins to develop based on success at accomplishing a goal.

⇒ *Implications for Parenting Plans/Access Schedules:*

- Infants require more frequent visits (high frequency/short duration) since they have not yet developed object constancy (For young infants, if an object cannot be seen then it is as if the object does not exist. When the infant develops object constancy, they know that an object still exists even if it cannot be seen.)
- In the best of all worlds, with good parenting and co-parenting, routines are the same across households, access is frequent, and visits may be

overnight beginning at an early age. (Note: These cases do not come to Court. Therefore, issues before the Court will typically not involve excellent parenting/co-parenting)

- Overnights for infants remain controversial. Review of the literature suggests that overnights may occur if parents are cooperative, supportive, communicate effectively and appropriately manage and contain conflict between the parents.
- Parents should avoid conflict in the child's presence.
- As conflict increases (level of conflict is the single greatest predictor of child's adjustment):
 - Transitions should be more limited
 - Visits should be shorter

2. TODDLER DEVELOPMENT: ONE TO THREE YEARS OF AGE

Overall Tasks:

- Balancing attachment and exploration with increasing movement toward autonomy
- Internalization of parental values and standards
- Developing the ability to symbolize through mental representation, play, and communication

Language and Communication:

- Burst of language development motivated by growing wish to communicate
- Rapid development of vocabulary, syntax, grammatical structures
- Use of language to understand and "construct" the world
- Use language to share experiences and beginning ability to slow down impulses by verbalizing them

Cognitive Development:

- Intense interest in understanding and learning about the world
- Development of conscious expectations and awareness of violations of expectations based on memory
- Ability to observe and imitate others facilitates learning
- Conscious goals and plans

Social Development:

- Egocentric view of the world dominates with limited ability to share or acknowledge others' different intentions
- Beginning understanding of reciprocity
- Imitation of parental behavior provides beginning understanding of social expectations
- Internalization of standards

- Beginnings of prosocial behavior
- Beginnings of autonomous self symbolized by independent behavior and use of the words "I," "me," "my," and "mine"

⇒ *Implications for Parenting Plans/Access Schedules:*

- If overnights have started and are going well (without regression), then may increase time to 24 hour overnight period. If overnights have not started then may attempt overnight and monitor anxiety and regression.
- In addition: Four to six hour access period, three days per week (in average situation with little overt conflict)

3. PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: THREE TO SIX YEARS OF AGE

Overall Tasks:

- Play becomes a vehicle for exploring reality
- Transitioning from view of world based on egocentric and magical thinking to a more logical and reality-based view

Language and Communication:

- Vocabulary at age 3 equals about 1000 words and increases at the rate of about 50 words each month
- Speech becomes clear and easier to understand
- Increasingly complex sentences with 8 – 10 words
- The child begins to direct behavior with private speech and out loud self-talk
- Language increasingly supplants action as the child's primary means of communication

Cognitive Development:

- Increasingly able to generalize and think in categories
- Beginning of cause and effect thinking but limitations in logical thinking can lead to mix-ups with cause and effect
- Egocentric thinking persists and causes of events are still attributed to the self
- Magical thinking and the fusion of fantasy and reality are common, especially when affect is significantly aroused such as in trauma
- Gradual internalization of moral values resulting in the establishment of a conscience by about age 6
- Increased self-monitoring, development of rule-governed behavior
- Guilt develops as a distinct emotion

Social Development:

- Transitional objects provide a sense of comfort and security
- Increasing importance of peer relationships with decreased egocentricity

- Development of social skills through interaction and play with peers
- Conflicts with others involving competition and exclusion
- Developing verbal approaches to conflict resolution
- More frequent prosocial interaction based on increasing identification with adult models
- More cooperation, sharing, and problem-solving skills
- Self-esteem is supported by child's growing sense of competence, autonomy, and coping abilities
- Preschool children who have received parental love and support over time tend to have a positive view of self
- Positive identification helps allay the child's anxiety about being small and incompetent relative to adults

⇒ *Implications for Parenting Plans/Access Schedules:*

- If overnights are going well (without regression), then may increase time to two consecutive overnights (which should be well-tolerated by four years old)
- In addition: six to eight hour access periods, one to two times per week (in average situation with little overt conflict)
- May consider week-long vacations by five-year-olds (e.g., winter vacation and two non-consecutive weeks during the summer)

4. MIDDLE CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT: SIX TO ELEVEN OR TWELVE YEARS OF AGE

Overall Tasks:

- To develop and utilize self-control
- To develop skills and a sense of competence
- To establish oneself in a world of peers

Language and Communication:

- Basic facility with syntax and grammar is established
- Gradually increasing understanding of nuances of meaning and more difficult grammatical features such as the passive voice
- Gradually increasing ability to put thoughts and feelings into words
- Development of a narrative ability – able to tell an organized story
- Some understanding of wordplay, jokes, figures of speech, metaphor

Cognitive Development:

- Increasingly accurate perception of reality
- Systematic ability to analyze perceptions by thinking back over them
- Improving understanding of cause and effect and decline in magical thinking

- Decline in egocentrism with increased ability to distinguish subjective and objective reality
- Development of concrete operations (Piaget) – the processes of logic and reasoning can be applied to understand immediate reality
- Developmental spurt in cognitive functions including spatial organization, visual organization, time orientation
- Greater executive functioning including new problem solving skills
- Apply cognitive strategies to self-regulation including logical thinking, using thinking to delay acting on impulses, conscious intent to stay focused on attainment of goals

Social Development:

- Increased orientation towards peers and life centers around school
- Social skills develop through peer interaction
- Development of peer group norms and status hierarchies
- Elaboration of gender roles and behavior
- Increasing clear view of others' viewpoints, social expectations, and social cues
- Aware of the psychological intent of others
- Can hold two opposing viewpoints in mind at the same time
- Capacity to see conflicting views and tolerate ambivalence improves self-control
- Internalized values creates need to gain self-esteem by pleasing oneself, not just others

⇒ *Implications for Parenting Plans/Access Schedules:*

- Typical situations should consider minimum of 35%/65% schedule (minimum of 5 out of 14 nights with each parent)
- Try to develop a plan so each parent has some contact with the child during the week
- Children can tolerate increased separation from each parent (in the usual case)

5. ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: TWELVE TO EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE

Overall Tasks:

- Develop a sense of self-efficacy (increasing ability to control life events and response to life events)
- Develop self-regulation
- Establish oneself as a separate person while maintaining a connection with group values (struggle for identity and emotional independence)
- Renegotiate relationship with parents

- Move from egocentric, narrow personal perspective to broader view involving societal, cultural, and religious attitudes
- Increased focus on intimacy and relationships

Language and Communication:

- Much thinking is internal (as opposed to thinking out loud as occurs in earlier stages)

Cognitive Development:

- Further development of the frontal lobe of the brain results in notable gains in cognitive functioning
- Further development of executive functions including attention, impulse control, organizing, planning and goal-setting behaviors
- Hypothetical reasoning skills emerge along with consideration of theoretical alternatives

Social Development:

- Increased focus on intimacy and relationships
- Adolescents' egocentrism leads them to feel that no one could possibly understand them
- Egocentrism contributes to sense of invincibility

⇒ *Implications for Parenting Plans/Access Schedules:*

- Schedules for early adolescents may not work well for late adolescents
- Benefit from some flexibility in Parenting Plan
- Want a say in the time-share arrangement (depending on family circumstances, may or may not be in child's interests)
- Many teens prefer a home base to be near friends and activities (and may not be due to a preference for one parent)
- Parents should strive to have consistent rules and expectations across households
- Quality and strength of relationship between parent and child is not as dependent upon time spent together