

Stages of Child Development

Infants: Birth to 12 Months and Toddlers: 12-24 Months

Developmental Tasks

- 1) To differentiate between key caregivers and all others
- 2) To consolidate a secure attachment with at least one primary caregiver
- 3) Through primary relationships, establish a sense of trust
- 4) Toddler uses relationships as a secure base from which to explore the world and return

Developmental Risks

- 1) The child's ability to establish a secure connection will be blocked by a loss of the caregiver's availability
- 2) Lack of continuity of care, and conflict between important caregivers, can inhibit development of trust

0-2 Years

- *Cries to get what he/she needs*
- *Sleeps less each month*
- *Develops primary and secondary attachments to caregivers with corresponding sense of security or insecurity*

Red Flags (first year)

Sleeping, crying, and eating problems indicate distress in an infant. Severe symptoms are lethargy, non-responsiveness, withdrawal, or acute agitation. The most likely reason for these problems is a response to an interruption in care and separation from the primary caregiver, a disruption in routine or biological needs that aren't being met.

Red Flags (second year)

Child demonstrates unusual or numerous fears, irritability, withdrawal, anxiety, anger, clinginess, and/or regression to earlier-age behaviors. Excessive fear of separation is shown by crying, clinging and prolonged (more than 20 minutes) inability to be consoled after transitions.

Toddlers: 24-36 Months

Developmental Tasks

To develop increasing autonomy and separateness

Developmental Risks

- 1) Lack of continuity of care
- 2) Parental conflict
- 3) Separation stress

...All increase risk of home and school-based behavioral problems, difficulty in formation of healthy relationships, and decreased capacity to be self-reliant

2 Years

- *Says "no" indiscriminately*
- *Has a short memory*
- *Can make very simple choices, but cannot make many kinds of choices*
- *Can't sit still*
- *Wants to know "why" and "how"*

Red Flags (2 years)

Child demonstrates unusual or numerous fears, irritability, withdrawal, anxiety, anger, clinginess, and/or regression to earlier-age behaviors. Excessive fear of separation is shown by crying, clinging and prolonged inability to be consoled after transitions.

Preschoolers: 3-5 Years

Developmental Tasks

- 1) Learn initiative
- 2) Become more autonomous
- 3) Develop peer relationships
- 4) Identify comfortably with his/her sex
- 5) Develop internal controls for impulses
- 5) Move from magical to logical thinking

Developmental Risks

Emotional chaos at home and in surrounding environment undermines child's ability to learn basic physical and intellectual skills necessary to master early school tasks and expectations.

3 Years

- *Tries to please*
- *Can talk enough to be understood about most concerns*
- *Feels and expresses sympathy*

4 Years

- *Enjoys being with friends more than adults*
- *Asks many questions*
- *Tattles*
- *Uses words to shock adults*
- *Stretches the truth*

5 Years

- *Imitates grown-up behaviors*
- *Often demanding*
- *Appearance of guilt*

Red Flags

- Behavior problems, anger, and regression to earlier behaviors are ways preschoolers express distress, anxiety, and insecurity.
- Some children become very controlling or show signs of blaming themselves for problems in the family.
- Persistent symptoms of sleep disturbance, bed-wetting, baby talk, stubborn acting out, being "too good", or withdrawing.
- It is important to know that the place the child is most likely to act up or express anger is with the parent she/he feels most secure with. It is common for children to act very differently in the presence of each parent, adding to parents' confusion about why they perceive the child's behaviors so differently. This is often a red herring for conflict between parents, as it does not signal the parent's lack of understanding, but the child's way of adjusting to aspects of the divorce that are hard to manage.

Young Children: 6-8 Years Old

Developmental Tasks

- 1) Distinguish between reality and fantasy
- 2) Expand knowledge of social and physical environment
- 3) Solidify sexual identification
- 4) Distinguish between thoughts, feelings and actions
- 5) Number of attachments expand, includes peers, teachers, and other special adults

Developmental Risks

- 1) Exposure to experiences for which the child is not prepared
- 2) Stunting the child's ability and openness to expanding interests and relationships

6-8 Years

- *Focused on world outside of family*
- *Proud of new academic accomplishments*
- *Falls in love with favorite adult authority figure(s)*
- *"Doing" is more important than completing*
- *Concrete and rule bound: good and bad, right and wrong*
- *Involves self in fights and relationship triangles*
- *Wants attention from father or other male*
- *Critical of self and others (8 year olds)*

Red Flags

- Behavioral problems, anger and aggression.
- It is important to remember that the child is most likely to act up or express anger is with the parent with whom she/he is feels most secure. A young child may express anger or be aggressive with the residential parent because of distress at the situation, but this should not be automatically interpreted as a sign of a problem in either parent/child relationship.
- Persistent sleep disturbance, reverting to bed-wetting, baby talk or other regressions are more serious signs of distress and help should be sought when these are present.

Children: 9-12 Years Old

Developmental Tasks

- 1) Develops a sense of accomplishment which focuses on mastering skills in regard to:
 - a) physical development
 - b) peer relationships
 - c) self-control
 - d) self-management
- 2) Develops and tests values and belief that will guide future decisions and behaviors

Developmental Risks

- 1) Children's sense of accomplishment and ability will be undermined by focus on stresses at home
- 2) Child will develop excessive concerns about performance and competition
- 3) Child will develop inappropriate or unhealthy relationships, especially with older peers and adults

9-11 Years

- *Alternates between child and adolescent identities*
- *Same sex peers and adults preferred*
- *Abstract thinking appears "why and "what may happen in future" can be considered and are better understood*
- *Demonstrates empathy*
- *Concerned about what others think, especially peers*
- *Refuses parental hugs and kisses*
- *Has strong opinions*

Early Adolescent: 12-14 Years Old

Developmental Tasks

- 1) Develop a social and personal identity
- 2) Explore autonomy and individuation from primary adult caregivers
Requires sense of sexual self, development of moral values, acceptance of responsibility for own behavior
- 3) Feel a sense of belonging to peer group(s)

Developmental Risks

- 1) Turmoil causes delays and setbacks in development of personal identity and healthy relationships
- 2) Stress may increase risk for seeking relief through alcohol, drugs, sex, and acting out behaviors

12-14 Years

- *Egocentric (focused on self and feels "no one else ever felt this way")*
- *May feel everyone is watching and no one understands*
- *Radical mood swings*
- *Highly charged emotionalism plus quest for independence leads to struggles against parental restrictions*

Adolescent: 15-18 Years or Older

Developmental Tasks

Develop sufficient competencies and autonomy to begin functioning independently in world

Developmental Risks

- 1) Over controlled adolescents less likely to establish identity and relationships with peers; may respond by rebelling or becoming overly dependent
- 2) Too much freedom and responsibility, beyond a teen's competencies, can lead to pseudo-maturity and strong dependence on peers and peer culture

15-19 Years

- *Balance various perspectives and able to see different sides*
- *More accepting of self and others than younger teens, and less judgmental as result*
- *Risk takers*
 - *A) Psychological – reveal thoughts and feelings*
 - *B) Physical – driving too fast, alcohol and drug usage, sexual activity*

Adolescents share certain attitudes and behaviors that can be disturbing to adults:

Forgetful

Complaining

Sarcasm

Feeling hopeless

Lack of enthusiasm for activities enjoyed previously

Angry and anxious in extremes

Pessimistic and cynical about what is "false" and "dishonest" in society

Critical of self and others

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