

**FOSTERING
DIFFERENCE**

CHILD DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES

A guide for Foster Parents

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‘The sign of great parenting is not the child’s behaviour.

The sign of truly great parenting is the parent’s behaviour’

Disclaimer:

This resource is part of a series of resources for foster parents who are raising children living with developmental difference caused by early life adversity. The guides are intended to provide general educational information only, and are not intended as a substitute for professional assessment and intervention.

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A Guide to Child Development

All children have challenging behaviour from time to time. Even a child who is reasonable most of the time will have days or moments where their behaviour is challenging. This might be when they are tired or feeling particularly stressed. It is generally accepted that while all children will go through periods where they misbehave; in most instances their behaviour doesn't reach a level that impacts on their ability to take part in normal everyday activities. Children with Developmental Difference can show behaviour that challenges and this often becomes problematic for the child because of how it affects their social relationships and schooling. This resource is intended to be a guide to the normal stages of child development. It is not meant to be definitive, but it can act as a useful 'conversation starter' with your child's caseworker. The following pages provide a guide to the expected trends in children's thinking, communication, social and emotional development. At each developmental stage, 'red flags' are also listed. Red flags are intended to act as prompts to discuss your child's development with their doctor or caseworker and indicate that specialist support may be needed.



A guide to your child's development from age 3-5 years

Children at this age are egocentric (this means they think the world revolves around them). Their thinking is 'magical' rather than logical. At this age, children can have difficulty separating fact from fantasy-this is related to their egocentric and magical ways of thinking about the world. It's all about them – they have genuine difficulty in seeing things from another person's perspective, and will often assume that another person has the same feelings as they do. All this means that they can have wonderful imagination, believing everything they wish for becomes real. If something bad happens, however, they are also likely to automatically believe that it is because they wished it to happen- for this reason children will blame themselves for trauma and loss that happens during this age. During this time they also begin to be curious about the difference between boys and girls- they may be curious about the difference between boy's and girls' anatomy. They begin to understand concepts



such as right or wrong, but rely on an adult to be present to role model and re-enforce moral behaviour.

Between three and five years of age your child...

- Is not able to take another person's perspective. They assume others feel as they do.
- Is beginning to develop a conscience-starts to feel guilty when disobedient.
- Starts to understand concepts of right and wrong, but relies on an adult to enforce these ideas. May not do the right thing when no adult is present.
- Engages in fantasy play and has difficulty in distinguishing between fantasy and reality. May believe their thoughts make things happen.
- Shows concern for friends that need help.
- Shows a wide range of emotions, cries when distressed.
- Can separate from mum or dad (or primary caregiver) relatively easily.
- Can dress and undress self with some help.
- Goes up and down stairs without help.
- Uses 4-5 word sentences, Can repeat four digits.
- Can be understood by most people.
- Uses 'I', 'we', 'me', and 'you' correctly.
- Most children are toilet trained by 3- 3 1/2 years

By age four your child should be able to...

- Ride a tricycle.
- Catch a bounced ball most of the time.
- Hop on one foot, do a somersault.
- Swing, climb, and may be able to skip.
- Cut along a line and can draw people with at least four 'parts.'
- Dress and undress usually without assistance.
- Follow three part commands.
- Understands concepts 'same' and 'different'.
- Count ten or more objects.
- Correctly name at least four colours.
- Speak in sentences of more than four words.
- Use future tense when talking.
- Say name and address.
- Use sentences that are more complex; speak well enough for strangers to understand.



- Display a vivid imagination; the line between their reality and imaginary worlds is often blurred.
- Show developmental appropriate fears – that include fear of the dark, fear of animals, fear of death.
- Cooperate with other children most of the time.
- Be curious about the difference between boys and girls.

Possible red flags indicating the need to seek further support:

- Failure to achieve most of the milestones outlined for this age.
- Failure to achieve the expected developmental milestones in communication.
- Child persistently lacks interest in social engagement.
- Loss of previously achieved self-care, toileting or eating skills.
- Increase display of fear at separation, sudden onset of night terrors, nightmares.
- If child is over 4 years of age and cannot grasp a crayon between thumb and fingers; shows no interest in interactive games; cannot understand a two part command (e.g., pick up the cup and put it on the table); is unable to concentrate on single activity from more than 5 minutes.
- Any sudden loss of previously acquired ability.



A guide to your child's development from age 5-7 years

During this stage your child's speech becomes more directed at social interaction, and less about their own personal feelings and wants. During this stage children develop the ability to describe themselves less in concreted terms (e.g., I can climb high) and begin to describe themselves in more dimensional terms (e.g., I am good at running but not so good at swinging). Children at this age begin to become aware that not everyone thinks or feels like them, and are increasingly interested in understanding and helping others.

Between five and seven years of age your child...

- Normally agrees to follow rules.
- Wants to be like their friends; friendship is important but friends change frequently.
- Can distinguish fantasy from reality; less involved with magical thinking.
- Can recognise another's person's perspective, but can't assume their role. Can recognise that others feel differently than them, but may not understand why.
- Starts to take on gender role (act as boy or girl); is aware of own gender.
- Starts to play co-operatively (for example, reliably taking turns); prefers to socialise with other children the same age.
- Questions others about their activities.
- Can sing, dance and act out some roles.
- May still need caregiver co-regulation, assistance and structure to regulate extreme emotions; emotions still frequently overwhelm.
- Is beginning to develop a sense of conscience that is beginning to be influenced by internal control or a belief in doing the right thing according to what adults want. For example, thinks "I would take it, but if my parents found out, they wouldn't approve".
- Cares for own toilet needs.
- Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or more.
- Uses fork, spoon and sometimes knife correctly.
- Draws a person and prints some letters.
- Speaks clearly, using seven or more words in a sentence.
- Can use future tense in sentences.
- Can count 10 or more objects reliably.
- Can name at least four colours reliably.
- Is more likely to follow rules if he/she has contributed to developing them.
- Can hop on one foot and skip.
- Can accurately copy figures.
- Commonly begins to read.



Possible red flags indicating the need to seek further support:

- Failure to achieve most of the milestones outlined for this age.
- Onset of sleep disturbance and/or regression to a sleep pattern characteristic of a younger child.
- Development and persistence of specific fears and phobias, including persistent separation anxiety.
- Failure to show interest in social interaction with peers.
- Loss of toileting skills; regression to early stage of development.
- Any loss of previously mastered skills.



A guide to your child's development from age 7-9 years

Children at this age show a strong interest in the differences between boys and girls. It's not uncommon for children of this age to want to play only with friends of the same sex. They may have lots of questions about pregnancy and babies. They tend to prefer the company of same sex friends, and friendships can be intense and exclusive.



Between seven years and nine years of age your child...

- Will have established firm friendships, usually with same sex peers.
- Have strong need to belong to peer and family identity group; self-identity is influenced by their friendship group, which is usually based on similar interests.
- Is able to regulate emotions in most situations.
- Is able to see situations from other's perspective – has developed empathy for others.
- Is able to resolve the majority of conflicts verbally without resort to violence or verbal abuse.
- Is increasingly able to take part in competition and able to tolerate losing.
- Has internalised sense of conscience-For example, thinks "I want that, but I don't feel good about taking it." Sense of right and wrong persists even if adults aren't watching.
- Forms friendships that are increasingly based on common interest.
- Can engage in longer and more complex conversations.
- Can start to understand the passage of time.
- May be able to demonstrate competence in literacy, computing or musical instrument. Individual strengths emerge.
- May have basic questions about pregnancy, sexual swearing, and intercourse.

Possible red flags indicating the need to seek further support:

- Failure to achieve most of the milestones outlined for this age.
- Onset of sleep disturbance and/or regression to a sleep pattern characteristic of a younger child.
- Development and persistence of specific fears and phobias, including persistent separation anxiety.
- Failure to show interest in social interaction with peers.
- Loss of toileting skills; regression to early stage of development.
- Any loss of previously mastered skills.





Your child aged 9-12 (pre-teens)

Children at this stage can use logical thinking well (rather than the magical thinking or concrete thinking of younger ages). They can appear very intolerant of the imaginative and illogical thinking of younger children. They are more interested in facts and general knowledge but are still developing the ability to apply their logical thinking to complex situations. Children at this age are focussed on concepts of fairness, and can place the needs of others over their own on occasion. This emphasis on fairness is not always reflected in their behaviour. They are interested in learning and mastering new skills. While the adults in their lives continue to be important role models, it will be important to your child to have a sense of belonging in their peer group. This will be the age at which the influence of friends and peers starts to become stronger.

Between nine years and twelve years of age your child...

- Can distinguish between bad behaviour and bad intentions most of the time (e.g., when someone does and doesn't mean to hurt them; when something happens by accident).
- Can accurately recognise and consider other's viewpoints.
- Can understand concepts of space, time and dimension.
- Can remember and narrate events from months or years earlier.
- Has a high need to experience success and mastery (e.g., making plans, setting and achieving goals, fixing things).
- Begins to develop alternative ways to deal with frustration, and alternative ways to express emotions.
- May play games with a mild sexual component (e.g., truth/dare) may be experimentation with "boyfriend/ girlfriends" relationship, some interest in kissing member of opposite sex.
- Behaviour is motivated by desire for social approval and to live up to expectations of people close to them.



- Tends to be disorganised and forgetful; needs adult support to plan ahead.
- May develop at a different rate to others- bones and muscles grow unevenly so that child can appear awkward.
- Can possibly start puberty early during this time (this might present difficulties with self-image).
- Is increasingly aware of their body relative to others and their body as part of their self-image.
- Becomes increasingly concerned with gender.
- Shows increasing interest in learning life skills from significant adults (e.g., cooking, fixing things etc).
- Is able to use language to communicate reliably.
- Is developing growing competence beyond the family and home (e.g., in school, sporting clubs).
- Clearly knows the difference between fantasy and reality.

Possible red flags indicating the need to seek further support:

- Failure to achieve most of the milestones outlined for this age.
- Poor social/academic adjustment in school
- Seems preoccupied, easily frustrated, shows frequent emotional outbursts.
- Shows difficulty concentrating or is overly reliant on teachers.
- Is easily overwhelmed by academic performance tasks (e.g., tests, projects).
- Has difficulties in friendships or has not formed friendships.
- Any loss of previously mastered skills.





Adolescence

During this stage your child's physical body is undergoing massive change and development. This corresponds with a surge of hormones that make the otherwise rationale child emotionally volatile. During this stage children begin the long process of defining themselves – the guiding questions of adolescents are “who am I?” and “where do I belong?”. Adolescence is a time of questioning and reflection and high emotionality. There is an increase need for sleep and social presentation becomes increasingly important during this time. There may be a renewed interest in their family of origin due to their developing self-identity.

Between twelve and fourteen years of age your child ...

- Begins the physical changes associated with puberty.
- Is now consistently able to think logically and abstractly.
- Is able to demonstrate perspective taking.
- Begins to transition from same sex friendship groups to mixed peer friendship groups.
- Begins to develop their own individual system of values.
- Has markedly increased need for sleep.
- Demonstrates morals and values that are based on respect for social order and on agreements between people: “law and order” morality.
- Becomes increasing concerned with weight, skin, height and overall appearance.
- Becomes intensely self-focussed (self-centred, and worrying what others think of them).
- Can become increasingly forgetful; increased moodiness.
- Shows increased focus on peer friendships and on identity outside of the family.



- Has increasing interest in making their own decisions, and is able to learn from mistakes.

Between fifteen and eighteen years of age your child...

- Will have completed his/her physical growth (puberty).
- May attain insight and abstract problem solving ability.
- Will form friendships based on loyalty, trust, and self-revelation. Is able to make conscious choices about who to trust.
- May become sexually active at this time.
- Conducts an active examination of other's values and beliefs; forms own identity by self-reflection and organising their attitudes, behaviour and values into a coherent 'whole' identity.
- Develops and elaborates their system of social values.
- Achieves sense of independence from family.
- Achieves a clear sense of identity.
- Is more able to think in abstract terms, apply learning from one situation to another.
- Has a tendency to think a lot about the future, focussed on future plans.
- May value moral principles over the strict application of the law.
- Undergoes intense process of identity formation and experimentation with identity.

Possible red flags indicating the need to seek further support:

- Failure to achieve most of the milestones outlined for this age.
- Persistent difficulty in managing intense emotions; has many intense mood swings.
- Seems to have little idea of self or trust in own values or beliefs.
- Is unable to make or keep friends.
- Has developed unrealistic expectations of him/herself or has inflated notion of self-worth/self-importance; indicating difficulty in identity formation.
- Talks about or has ideas of self-harm, lack of focus on future.
- Any loss of previously mastered skills.



Developmental trends information in this resource is adapted from:

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Ozretich, R & Bowman, S.R. (2001) Middle childhood and Adolescent Development. Oregon State University.

Department of Human Services, Victoria (2012). Child Development and Trauma: Best Interests case practice model, Specialist practice resource.

Institute for Human Services (2007) Developmental Milestones Chart www.healthychildren.org

For further information on developmental trends for children see:

www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework-resource-kit

www.familyeducation.com/home

www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/child-development

www.healthychildren.org

To find out more about Developmental Difference and your child,
visit;

www.fosteringdifference.com.au

