



# The Parent's Guide to Early Development

A reassuring roadmap for your  
child's milestones (0 to 6 years)

*Inspiring Hope, Enriching Lives.  
Every child grows at their own  
beautiful pace.*



# 0–3 Months: Sensory Exploration

## Speech & Language

- Coos and makes gurgling sounds
- Uses different cries for hunger, pain, or sleep

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Lifts head 45–90 degrees during tummy time
- Actively opens and closes hands

## Social & Play

- Turns head toward your voice or a sound
- Smiles in response to your face

## Cognitive Skills

- Follows moving objects with eyes
- Shows intense interest in human faces



## What you might notice at home:

They go quiet and stare intently when you start talking to them. (Tip: If they grab your hair, gently bend their wrist to release!)



## When to seek support:

Doesn't respond to loud sounds or isn't noticing their own hands yet.

# 3–6 Months: Engaging with the World

## Speech & Language

- Begins to babble and copy sounds
- Laughs aloud during play

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Rolls from side to back
- Reaches for and grabs toys with intent

## Social & Play

- Enjoys playtime and might cry when it stops
- Recognizes familiar people from a distance

## Cognitive Skills

- Explores the world by putting everything in their mouth
- Looks at objects while holding them



What you might notice at home:

They enthusiastically try to stuff their favorite rattle, their toes, and your fingers into their mouth to explore how they feel.



When to seek support:

Struggles to hold their head steady when sitting up, or rarely smiles at familiar faces.

# 6–9 Months: Movement and Interaction

## Speech & Language

- Strings vowels together (“ah-eh-oh”)
- Consistently responds to their own name

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Sits up without physical support
- Passes objects smoothly from one hand to the other

## Social & Play

- Starts using early body language to communicate
- Shows varying facial expressions (joy, surprise)

## Cognitive Skills

- Looks for things they see you hide
- Bangs toys together to explore sound and cause-and-effect



### What you might notice at home:

They drop food from the highchair just to watch it fall—and to see your reaction!



### When to seek support:

Doesn't try to get toys that are in reach, or doesn't react to familiar voices.

# 9–12 Months: The First Gestures

## Speech & Language

- Understands simple words like "no"
- Uses basic gestures (waving hello/goodbye, shaking head)

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Pulls up to stand and cruises along furniture
- Uses a pincer grasp (thumb and index finger) for small items

## Social & Play

- Begins holding arms up to be picked up
- Shows specific preferences for certain toys or people

## Cognitive Skills

- Copies simple actions (like clapping)
- Explores toys in different ways (shaking, banging, throwing)



## What you might notice at home:

They reach their arms up to you when they are tired, clearly using their body to say, "Pick me up."



## When to seek support:

Rarely uses gestures to communicate, or consistently doesn't respond to their name after you call it 3 times (always check hearing first!).

# 12–18 Months: The Urge to Share

## Speech & Language

- Uses 3 or more single words (besides mama/dada) spontaneously
- Follows simple 1-step instructions without you pointing

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Walks independently
- Helps with dressing
- Helps with dressing (pushing arms through sleeves)

## Social & Play

- Points to things they want you to see
- Brings objects to you just to share their excitement

## Cognitive Skills

- Uses items correctly (drinking from a cup, brushing hair)
- Transitions from pure exploration to early functional play



## What you might notice at home:

They spot an airplane, point to it, and immediately look back at your face to make sure you're seeing it too.



## When to seek support:

You stop pushing a toy car back to them, and they get upset but just stare at the car, never looking up at your eyes to ask for help.

# 18–24 Months: Pretend Play Emerges

## Speech & Language

- Expands vocabulary to 20–50 words
- Starts linking two words together (“More apple”, “Big dog”)

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Begins to run safely
- Eats with a spoon independently



## Social & Play

- Pretend play emerges (feeding a doll, putting teddy to bed)
- Becomes your “little shadow,” perfectly copying your daily chores

## Cognitive Skills

- Conversational rhythm appears (babbling with upward/downward tones)
- Understands much more than they can say



## What you might notice at home:

Their toy cars aren't just for spinning anymore; they imagine they are real and make “vroom-vroom” sounds as they drive.



## When to seek support:

Play consists mostly of literal, repetitive actions (like just spinning the car wheels) or lining toys up in perfect, unchanging rows.

# 2–3 Years: Parallel Play and Patterns

## Speech & Language

- Uses clear sentences of 2–3 words
- Can name familiar everyday things when asked

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Climbs on and off furniture effortlessly
- Turns pages in a book one at a time

## Social & Play

- Engages in “parallel play” (playing happily right next to other children)
- Notices other children and may copy what they do in the sandbox

## Cognitive Skills

- Creates complex storylines in pretend play (cooking a feast)
- Follows 2-step instructions



## What you might notice at home:

When you brush your teeth, they immediately grab their brush to copy you. Imitation is how they learn!



## When to seek support:

Strong distress over tiny routine changes, or performing the same repetitive body movements (rocking, flapping) daily for months as their primary play.

# 3-4 Years: Curiosity and Friendships

## Speech & Language

- Endlessly asks "who," "what," "where," and "why" questions
- Can be understood by most strangers

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Pedals a tricycle
- Uses child-safe scissors

## Social & Play

- Transitions from parallel play to actively playing with other children
- Understands taking turns in simple games

## Cognitive Skills

- Understands the concept of "two"
- Recalls parts of a favorite story



## What you might notice at home:

They start assigning roles during playtime: "You be the doctor, I'll be the patient."



## When to seek support:

Shows little interest in interacting with other children in the sandbox (e.g., heading straight for the slide to watch sand fall alone), or speech remains difficult to understand.

# 4-5 Years: Stories and Structure

## Speech & Language

- Tells short stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Uses future tense confidently (“I will go”)

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Hops and stands on one foot
- Draws a person with a recognizable body

## Social & Play

- Wants to please friends and be like them
- Can agree to rules in board games (mostly!)

## Cognitive Skills

- Understands the concept of time (yesterday, today, tomorrow)
- Can count 10 or more objects



## What you might notice at home:

They proudly show you a drawing and explain the elaborate, highly imaginative story behind it.



## When to seek support:

Suddenly loses speech or social skills they once had, or struggles significantly to follow multi-step instructions.

# 5–6 Years: Empathy and School Readiness

## Speech & Language

- Speaks clearly and fluidly in full, complex sentences
- Enjoys rhymes, jokes, and wordplay

## Gross & Fine Motor

- Skips and jumps with good balance
- Writes some letters or their own name

## Social & Play

- Shows true empathy when others are hurt or upset
- Enjoys structured group activities and sports

## Cognitive Skills

- Knows colors, shapes, and everyday objects well
- Understands the difference between fantasy and reality



## What you might notice at home:

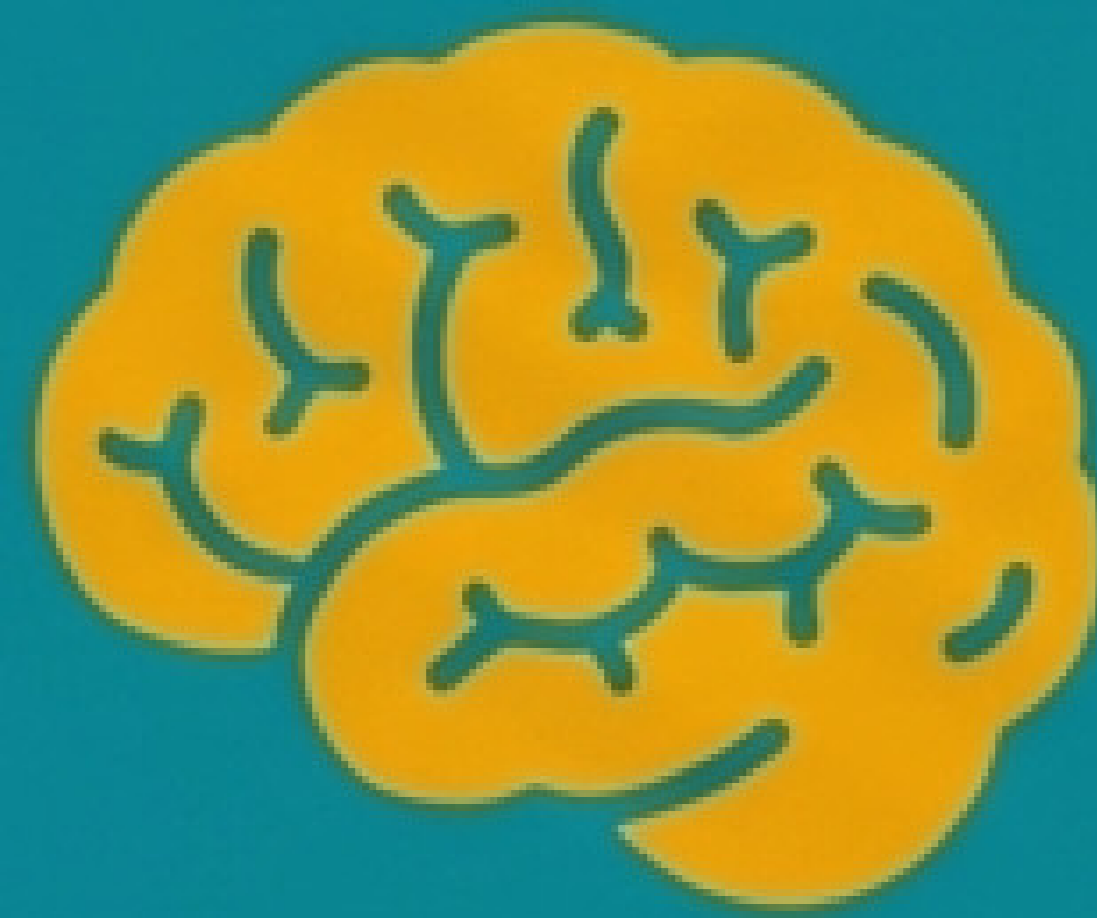
They comfort a sibling who is crying, showing they actively understand someone else's feelings.



## When to seek support:

Extreme difficulty separating from parents, or intense, rigid patterns of play that cannot be interrupted without a meltdown.

# The Power of "Catching It Early"



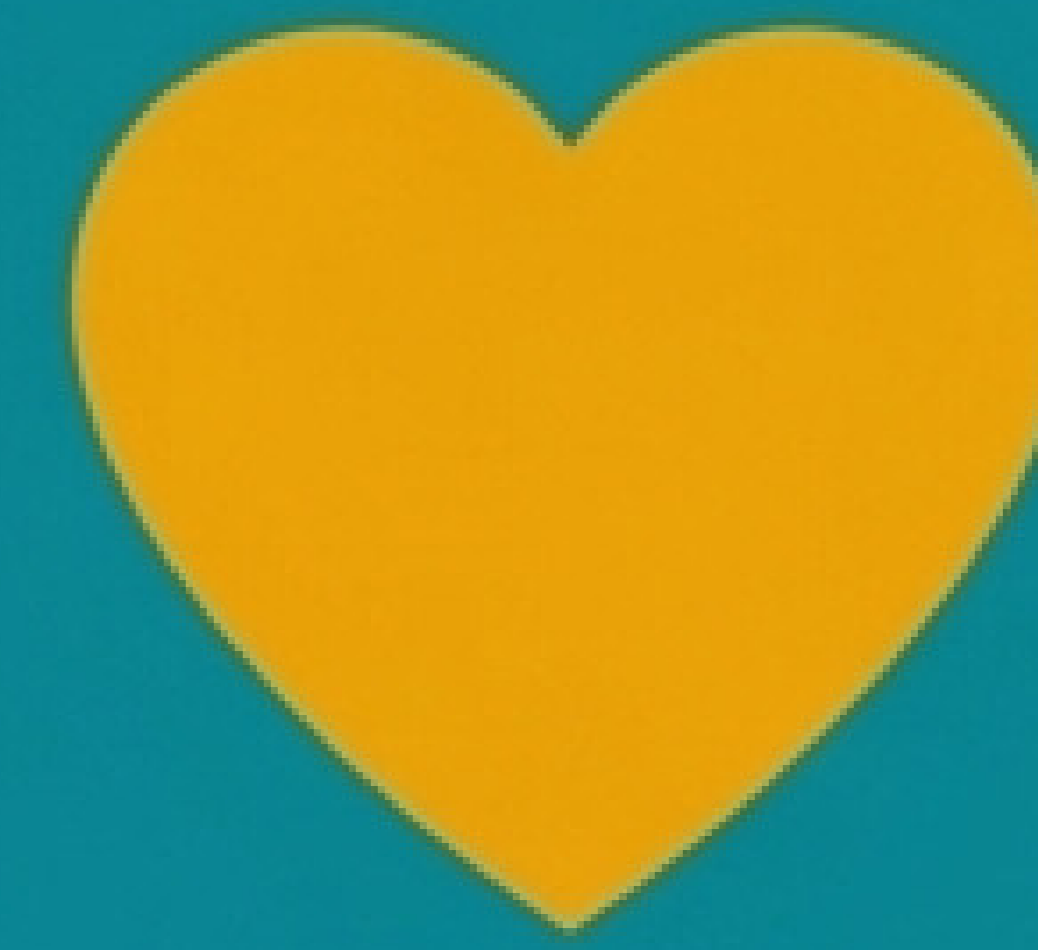
## Brain Plasticity

In the first few years, a child's brain is highly adaptable. Small supports now create massive leaps in development later.



## Better Outcomes

Whether it's a temporary language delay, autism, or a unique learning style, children who get early, tailored support get the best possible outcomes.



## Peace of Mind

Trust your instincts. Documenting quirks and checking in with professionals replaces midnight worrying with an actionable plan.

# Small Changes, Big Differences

How we speak to our children shapes how they learn to communicate.

Instead of...

Directing play from above.

Stopping them from copying your chores.

Saying "Use your words" (which can cause frustration).

Saying "Calm down" during a meltdown.

**Try...**

Getting on the floor! Push a car back and forth, pause, and wait for them to make eye contact before you continue.

Encouraging it! When they copy you brushing teeth or clapping, lean in. Imitation is how they master life skills.

Modeling the word for them. ("You want the apple? Here is the apple.")

Offering a safe, quiet presence and validating the emotion.



## You don't have to navigate this alone.

If you've noticed a few of these "gentle signs," or if you simply want to understand your child's unique developmental path, we are here to help. Only a professional can provide a true assessment, but you take the most important first step simply by asking the question.

[Schedule a Gentle Consultation](#)

**Esperanza**

Inspiring Hope, Enriching Lives.  
Every child deserves the best start.