

0 - 3 Months

Babies are born relationship ready and in their first three months of life are actively trying to make sense of their world. Before they can even speak, babies communicate with their facial expressions, voices and body language. As caregivers and babies get to know each other, babies will depend on their caregivers to recognize their cues and respond to their needs in a sensitive, timely and consistent way. This is the beginning of a trusting relationship that will extend to the wider world in later years. Babies' relationships and experiences lay the foundation for their mental health now, throughout their childhood, and well into their adult years.

Over the first three months, a baby will:

- **Gaze at her caregiver's face and look in the direction of her caregiver's voice.**
Baby's caregivers should bring their faces close so that baby can see their features and expressions. Baby may not initially make eye contact since her vision has not fully developed, but she will enjoy looking up and seeing her caregivers' faces.
- **Smile spontaneously.**
By 2 – 3 months, a baby's social smiles are signs that she knows her caregivers.
- **Recognize a familiar voice.**
For months before baby was born, her mother's voice was what she heard most. She will follow that voice, turning her head in that direction, and will prefer it over others.
- **Make cooing sounds when she is happy, contented and communicative.**
- **Be soothed when picked up and comforted (most of the time).**
- **Express her emotions and needs through her cries and actions.**
Baby will find a way to let her caregivers know that she needs attention when hungry, tired or uncomfortable, e.g., in need of a diaper change.

4 - 6 Months

With loving, nurturing early relationships baby is beginning to understand his physical and social surroundings and learning to discover his world. He knows who his caregivers are and who he can trust to respond to his needs. This is the start of the attachment relationship and will be dependent on how well caregivers provide consistent, responsive and appropriate care. As baby continues to learn about his world and to make sense of the things around him, his caregivers need to continue to provide loving and responsive relationships to help guide him through those experiences.

By 6 months a baby will begin to:

- **Intentionally express his emotions.**
He will cry or get agitated when he wants attention, e.g., he may laugh and smile while interacting with his caregivers or he may show that he is excited by quickly waving his arms and legs around.
- **Recognize his primary caregivers.**
A baby feels safest around his primary caregivers and seeks a familiar presence. He knows who his primary caregivers are and that they will respond to his needs.
- **Make eye contact.**
Baby will begin to focus for longer periods of time as his vision has developed more since birth and he can now see things more clearly and farther away. When a caregiver sings, babbles or imitates the sounds baby makes, baby will look up at his caregiver and make eye contact. He engages by cooing and babbling back.
- **Read facial and vocal expressions and learn what different forms of interaction mean.**
When his caregivers engage with him, e.g., talking, singing, cooing or babbling, baby will respond and make eye contact. When he hears his caregivers getting angry and speaking in a voice that is louder than normal, he might become scared and cry. He will know something is not right and may become agitated and seek his caregivers' attention.
- **Form an attachment with his primary caregivers.**
When caregivers respond to their baby's needs especially when he is distressed, baby will know he can trust and depend on his caregivers. With positive, consistent care, baby will form secure attachments with his caregivers.

7 - 12 Months

By the age of one, baby is learning more about her world and may even have an opinion about things she likes or dislikes. She is beginning to get around by crawling, walking by holding onto furniture or perhaps even on her own with no support. She is curious to learn about the things around her and can now actively explore. Baby can now understand simple language and words like “no,” “bye,” or “shoes.”

Baby will:

- **Begin to intentionally tell her caregivers what she wants.**
Baby will make gestures or point at objects that she wants. She will begin to put her arms out or up when she wants to be picked up. She will begin to babble more and may even say a couple of words to interact and communicate.
- **Begin to miss her caregivers when they are not around.**
When her caregivers leave the room baby will notice, become upset and may begin to cry. She misses her caregivers when they're not there and looks for them.
- **Begin to seek comfort from her caregivers.**
When baby gets upset or hurt she will want and need to be comforted by her caregivers. It is important to respond to baby's distress by comforting her. Comfort her and give her words to help her label her feelings.
- **Show her caregivers her emotions.**
When baby gets scared she will want to be near her caregivers and maybe cling to them. When she gets mad she might make a frustrated face. Or when she feels shy she may hide behind them or try to cover her face.
- **Begin to show affection towards her caregivers.**
Baby will want to be hugged and kissed and in return she will hug and kiss her caregivers back. She will begin to understand the words “hug” and “kiss” and do these things spontaneously.
- **Develop a sense of herself as a separate person with her own likes and dislikes.**
Baby is starting to have dislikes and likes about her experiences, her toys and the people around her. She will let her caregivers know what she enjoys doing and being around, and what she does not like to do.

13 - 18 Months

Baby is starting to understand more of what he hears and is enjoying the use of language. He enjoys hearing short stories and simple songs. He will point at pictures in books and try and sing along to songs he is familiar with. Baby enjoys reading the same books and hearing the same songs over and over; he enjoys knowing what will happen next in the book or song. Repetition helps him memorize simple songs which will help him build his vocabulary.

Baby will:

- **Become more confident and have a greater sense of himself.**
Baby has more likes and dislikes when it comes to what he plays with, who he wants to play with and when he wants to interact with people.
- **Begin to take ownership of objects belonging to him, such as toys.**
Baby will have a difficult time with sharing since his toys right now belong to him. His caregivers will hear him using words like “no,” “mine,” etc.
- **Notice his peers.**
Baby is becoming interested in what others are doing or what they are playing with. He may not join in and play with them but rather sit beside them and play on his own. He will watch his peers but may not initiate any interaction with them.
- **Express his emotions to his caregivers.**
Baby will still feel a lot of emotions, so his caregivers should comfort him and help him label his feelings. Labeling feelings will give baby ownership of his emotions, and with time he will learn how to express them.

19 - 24 Months

Baby is growing into an independent toddler. She is mastering things on her own and seeks less help from her caregivers. She is beginning to engage in imaginary play. As she watches and observes her surroundings, she will begin to imitate the actions of others and try to role-play. She might pick up a broom to “houseclean,” or play “mom” with her dolls, etc. She is beginning to use simple sentences with the words she knows and is beginning to communicate and use language more easily. She notices her peers around her and enjoys their company but may need help mastering her social play skills, like sharing and turn taking.

A toddler will:

- **Begin to learn about others’ feelings and the concept of empathy.**
Baby is aware of her peers and is beginning to understand they have feelings just like she does. When someone takes a toy away from a friend or hits a friend, it hurts her and she may cry too. She is beginning to develop empathy for the people she cares for and realizes other people also get sad. Baby is developing the ability to take another person’s perspective.
- **Want to make her own choices and decisions about how she does things.**
Baby is becoming more independent as she masters doing things on her own. She will still look for assistance from her caregivers when she needs help. She is still dependent on them and knows they will comfort her and respond to her when needed.
- **Begin to develop a sense of imagination as she takes on different roles and engages in pretend play.**
- **Have more words that she uses to express herself and to get what she wants.**
By the age of two, baby’s communication will evolve from using simple two-word sentences to more complex complete sentences.
- **Parallel play starts with toddlers playing next to each other.**
They may not share or be doing the same activity but they will play next to each other.

25 - 36 Months

Toddlers are confidently exploring the world, and when given the chance, are socially engaged with other children and adults. They are beginning to understand the children's stories read to them and are talking about their own personal experiences and the events they are involved in. They are also engaged in more complex imaginary play, from watching and imitating people around them to pretending to be characters they hear about in the books read to them.

A toddler will:

- **Be actively forming friendships with his peers when given the chance.**
A toddler may have one specific friend that he always plays with and prefers to be around. He learns to play, engage and interact with others. Ensuring he has consistent play experiences is important for his development.
- **Use more language between these months.**
A toddler will communicate what he wants and how he feels. He is starting to have conversations with peers and the adults he's around, sharing details about himself and his adventures. He has a grasp of language and his speech is now more easily understood. His use of words, complete sentences and overall vocabulary will increase significantly.
- **Begin to use words to express his feelings.**
Caregivers will know when a toddler is happy, scared, sad or mad. With encouragement he will try and use words to express these feelings, but of course, he will still use gestures, such as walking away, crying or throwing something.
- **Engage in more imaginative play.**
Not only will a toddler imitate the people around him, but he will begin to use his imagination with several objects. He will enjoy pretending different objects symbolize something else—a block turns into a train or playdough turns into a dinosaur.
- **Become more aware of peers and will be increasingly sympathetic toward them when they are upset.**
A toddler will recognize others' feelings and might even comfort peers when he sees they are upset.
- **Become more engaged in social play skills.**
A toddler is beginning to learn how to share and take turns. Cooperative play may still be difficult but he is learning to play with others and enjoy their company.

37 - 48 Months

Preschoolers are becoming their own person and standing up for what they want. They show more self-esteem, confidence, optimism and enjoyment of daily activities. He will have endless questions about how things work and why things happen. Language development is still on the fast track and most three-year olds will have a vocabulary of over 700 words. Three-year olds are better at understanding and following simple rules and controlling their impulses. Four-year olds are more even-tempered and cooperative with parents though they still stand up for what they want. His imagination is developing with make-believe play and he enjoys playing out situations that are familiar in his life.

A preschooler will:

- **Enjoy playing with other children.**
He is socializing well and is showing improved skills in turn-taking, sharing, and co-operating.
- **Greet familiar adults.**
He will also be appropriately using words such “please” and “thank you”.
- **Experience a broad range of feelings.**
Preschoolers are learning and experiencing a broader range of emotions such as jealousy, excitement, fear, happiness, and anger.
- **Have the skills to express anger verbally.**
A preschooler near the end of this stage will use a vocabulary of approximately 900 words, including five-word sentences, which allows for him to be able to express his anger more specifically with words rather than physically.
- **Be an accomplished negotiator.**
With increased vocabulary, a preschooler will negotiate and try to make things go his way.
- **Become less egocentric.**
He will be more able to understand feelings and point of view of others, for example, showing empathy for a friend who is upset. Becoming less self-centered is helping him feel less upset with limits and discipline.

49 - 60 Months

A preschooler is a pretty capable person by now. A four-year old is full of energy, her imagination is developing with make-believe play and she enjoys playing out situations that are familiar in her life. By year five, she is embracing life fully. She is learning to cope with frustration and to understand rules. With the emergence of a conscience, she adopts rules, accepting them as her own. She is much better at taking turns and playing cooperatively, as well as planning and problem solving with others. She can now speak almost like an adult, using correct grammar 90% of the time, making navigating social-emotional situations more easily than previously.

A preschooler will:

- **Play games with simple rules.**
While she began with an egocentric view, she is learning that rules are important socially. Games like Follow the Leader, Red Rover, Simon Says, and soccer do not work if nobody is following the rules. She is consequently learning that life also has rules (laws) that help society function productively.
- **Enjoy dramatic play with other children.**
She loves using her imagination to play pretend with other children. This includes elements of imitative play and make-believe play. It requires verbal interaction between two or more children. Because it is interactive, it requires planning.
- **Begin to grasp the concept of sharing.**
She is starting to understand why sharing is important. There is an increased awareness of other people's minds, allowing her to negotiate, resolve conflict, and monitor the emotional state of a group.
- **Experience self-esteem.**
She will feel good about herself and take pride in her accomplishments.
- **Concentrates and works alone for up to 20-30 minutes.**
Her attention span is growing, allowing her to accomplish tasks she has never accomplished before.
- **Keep going on a difficult task for longer periods.**
Her ability to continue trying while working on a difficult task is expanding, and while she may need some guidance and help to accomplish the task, she is sometimes able to problem solve and accomplish the task independently.