

## Developmental Milestones Guide for Parents

### Based on NHS Child Development Guidance

Tracking your child's development should not feel like a test. Children develop at different rates, and variation is a normal part of early childhood. Development is influenced by many factors, including temperament, health, opportunities for learning, family environment, and exposure to one or more languages.

The developmental milestones in this guide are based on NHS child development guidance and other widely recognised developmental references used by healthcare professionals. They are intended as a general guide rather than a diagnostic tool.

For families in Dubai, it is also important to remember that many children grow up in multilingual environments. A child may hear and use more than one language at home, nursery, or within the community. When considering communication milestones, it is important to look at your child's total communication across all languages rather than focusing on a single language.

Use this guide to observe your child's development, celebrate strengths, and identify any areas where you may wish to seek further advice.

### 12 Months (1 Year): Building Early Foundations

By their first birthday, most children are becoming more mobile, increasingly curious about their surroundings, and beginning to use communication to connect with the people around them.

#### Communication and Language

- Responds to their name consistently.
- Uses a variety of babbling sounds such as "ba-ba," "da-da," or similar combinations.
- Uses gestures such as waving, reaching, lifting arms to be picked up, or shaking their head.

#### Motor Skills

- Pulls to stand using furniture or support.
- Cruises along furniture while holding on.
- Picks up small objects using their thumb and finger (pincer grasp).

### **Social and Emotional Development**

- Looks towards an object when another person points to it.
- Enjoys simple interactive games such as peek-a-boo.
- Shows interest in familiar people and may seek comfort from primary caregivers.

### **Parent Note**

Children develop at different rates, and not every child will achieve all milestones at exactly the same age. If you have concerns about several areas of development or notice a loss of previously acquired skills, consider discussing your concerns with a qualified healthcare professional.

### **18 Months: Exploring, Communicating, and Learning**

At this stage, children are becoming more independent and are increasingly aware that they can communicate their needs, preferences, and interests to the people around them.

#### **Communication and Language**

- Uses at least 10 words consistently across any language spoken in the home.
- Points to request something they want.
- Follows simple one-step instructions such as "Give me the ball."

#### **Motor Skills**

- Walks independently.
- Scribbles spontaneously with a crayon.
- Drinks from a cup with some assistance.

#### **Social and Emotional Development**

- Copies simple actions during play.
- Shows interest in sharing experiences with familiar adults.
- Explores their environment while checking back with caregivers for reassurance.

### Parent Note

Communication can look different in multilingual households. When counting words, consider all words your child uses meaningfully across all languages they hear and speak.

### 24 Months (2 Years): Developing Language and Independence

By two years of age, many children are becoming more confident communicators and are developing greater independence in everyday activities.

#### Communication and Language

- Uses approximately 50 words or more across all languages.
- Combines two words into simple phrases such as "more juice" or "mummy go."
- Identifies familiar objects or body parts when named.

#### Motor Skills

- Runs confidently.
- Kicks a ball forward.
- Walks up and down stairs with support.

#### Social and Emotional Development

- Plays alongside other children (parallel play).
- Shows awareness of other people's emotions.
- Demonstrates increasing independence and preferences.

### Parent Note

Children often develop communication and emotional regulation skills at different rates. Occasional frustration and tantrums are a normal part of development at this age.

### 36 Months (3 Years): Nursery and FS1 Readiness

Three years of age is an important stage for many families in Dubai, as children may be preparing for nursery programmes or Foundation Stage 1 (FS1).

### **Communication and Language**

- Uses sentences containing three to four words.
- Answers simple "who," "what," or "where" questions.
- Is understood by familiar adults around 75% of the time.

### **Motor Skills**

- Climbs confidently on age-appropriate playground equipment.
- Rides a tricycle or uses a three-wheeled scooter.
- Copies a simple circle when drawing.

### **Social and Emotional Development**

- Takes turns during simple games with support.
- Begins engaging in cooperative play with other children.
- Follows simple two-step instructions.

### **Parent Note**

School readiness involves more than academic skills. Communication, emotional regulation, play skills, and the ability to participate in group activities are all important areas of development.

### **48 Months (4 Years): Preparing for Greater Independence**

By four years of age, many children are preparing for FS2 or KG1 and are developing skills that support participation in more structured learning environments.

### **Communication and Language**

- Uses longer sentences to talk about experiences and events.
- Answers simple questions about everyday situations.
- Uses grammar that is becoming increasingly accurate.

### **Motor Skills**

- Hops on one foot.

- Uses a more mature pencil grip when drawing or colouring.
- Catches or throws a large ball with increasing coordination.

### **Social and Emotional Development**

- Enjoys playing with other children and sharing ideas during play.
- Adapts to familiar routine changes with support.
- Follows instructions containing three steps.

### **Parent Note**

Development continues throughout childhood. Some children may be stronger in one area than another, and variation in skill development is common.

### **The Red Flags: When to Seek an Assessment**

Children develop at different rates, but some signs may indicate that additional assessment or support would be helpful.

Consider discussing your concerns with a qualified healthcare professional if you notice any of the following:

#### **Communication Concerns**

- No babbling, gestures, or meaningful communication by around 12 months.
- No single words by around 18 months.
- No spontaneous two-word phrases by around 24 months.
- Difficulty understanding simple language compared with peers.

#### **Social Communication Concerns**

- Limited response to their name alongside other communication concerns.
- Limited use of gestures such as pointing, showing, or waving.
- Reduced interest in sharing experiences with others.
- Persistent difficulties engaging socially with familiar people.

#### **Developmental Concerns**

- Delays across multiple developmental areas.

- Significant difficulties with learning age-appropriate skills.
- Challenges with everyday self-care tasks beyond what would typically be expected for age.

### **Behavioural and Sensory Concerns**

- Highly repetitive behaviours that interfere with daily activities.
- Intense interests that significantly restrict participation in other activities.
- Significant distress related to routine changes or sensory experiences.

### **Loss of Skills**

- Loss of previously acquired language, social, play, or motor skills at any age.

A developmental assessment can help identify strengths, clarify areas of need, and guide appropriate support planning.

### **Your Next Steps**

If your child is achieving many of these milestones, that is encouraging. If you notice several areas where your child may need additional support, try not to focus on any single milestone in isolation.

Development is complex, and children grow at different rates. A developmental assessment provides a more complete picture than any checklist alone.

At Small Steps Big Dreams, our multidisciplinary team works with families across Dubai to better understand each child's developmental profile and identify practical next steps for learning, communication, independence, and participation.

Whether you are seeking reassurance, guidance, or a more detailed assessment, early conversations can help families make informed decisions and access support when needed.

**Book an initial consultation with our team or explore our Developmental Pathway Guide to learn more about developmental assessment and support services in Dubai.**

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