

Milestones for toddlers 18 months to 3 years



Toddlers are very active - running, climbing and exploring. There are many things you can do to help your toddler grow and develop. Parents/caregivers play an important role in helping them learn to manage big feelings and feel loved. Toddlers do best in loving and caring environments.

Developmental milestones are things most children can do by a certain age, eg using a spoon or kicking a ball for the first time. All children are different, some will do things faster and some slower.

At least three quarters of all toddlers will meet their developmental milestones at each age below. If you are worried your toddler is not meeting their milestones talk to a child health nurse or other health professional.

If your child was born prematurely adjust their age by subtracting the weeks/months they were born early, eg an 8 month baby born 2 months early has an adjusted age of 6 months. Check milestones for their adjusted age until they reach 2 years of age.


What most children do by 18 months

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Move away from you but look to make sure you are close by.
- Point to show you something interesting.
- Put hands out for you to wash them.
- Look at a few pages in a book with you.
- Help you dress them by pushing their arm through a sleeve or lifting a foot.

Language/Communication Milestones

- Try to say three or more words besides "mama" or "dada".

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- Follow one-step directions without any gestures, eg giving you the toy when you say 'Give it to me'.

Cognitive Milestones (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Copy you doing chores, eg sweeping with a broom.
- Play with toys in a simple way, eg pushing a toy car.

Movement/Physical Development Milestones

- Walk without holding onto anyone or anything.
- Scribble.
- Drink from a cup without a lid and may spill sometimes.
- Feed themselves with their fingers.
- Try to use a spoon.
- Climb on and off a couch or chair without help.

Help your toddler grow and learn

- Toddlers love songs and chants with hand actions. Finger plays and songs can be found in many languages and cultures. "Open, Shut Them", "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "The Wheels on the Bus" are some popular ones in English. You can find many examples on YouTube.

- At this age children love to help. Simple activities such as sweeping, putting away toys or books or placing clothes in a laundry basket are all great for practising new skills. Give simple instructions and reminders to help your toddler gain confidence. Do chores together and make them fun, eg listening to music or racing to do them as fast as you can.
- Give simple choices. Let your child choose between two things, eg ask if they want to wear the red or blue shirt.
- Ask simple questions to help them think about what's around them, eg 'What is that?'.
- Start to teach the names for body parts by pointing them out and saying things like 'Here's your nose, here's my nose'.
- Encourage "pretend" play, eg give your toddler a spoon to pretend to feed a stuffed animal. Take turns pretending.

Children learn by talking, playing and interacting with others. Screen time is not recommended for children under 2 years of age. Limit screen time for older toddlers to no more than 1 hour a day - they can watch a children's program with an adult present. Limiting your own screen time allows you to respond to their words and actions.

- Use positive words and give more attention to behaviours you want to see than those you don't want to see, eg 'Look how nicely you put the toy away'.
- When a tantrum happens it is important to stay with your child and help them calm down. They will gradually learn to manage their feelings. Tantrums are normal at this age and should become shorter and happen less often as they get older.
- Create a space at home for your toddler to go to when they are upset. Stay nearby so they know they are safe and can come to you if they need help to calm.
- Help them learn about others' feelings and positive ways to react, eg when they see a child who is sad say 'He looks sad. Let's bring him a teddy'.

What most children do by 2 years

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Notice when others are hurt or upset, eg pausing or looking sad when someone is crying.
- Look at your face to see how to react in a new situation.

Language/Communication Milestones

- Point to things in a book when you ask, eg 'Where is the bear?'.
- Say at least two words together, eg 'More milk'.
- Point to at least two body parts when you ask them to show you.
- Use more gestures than just waving and pointing, eg blowing a kiss or nodding yes.

Cognitive Milestones

(learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Hold something in one hand while using the other hand, eg holding a container and taking the lid off.
- Try to use switches, knobs or buttons on a toy.
- Play with more than one toy at the same time, eg putting toy food on a toy plate.

Movement/Physical Development Milestones

- Kick a ball.
- Run.
- Walk (not climb) up a few stairs with or without help.
- Eat with a spoon.

Help your toddler grow and learn

- Help your child learn how words sound even if they can't say them clearly yet, eg if they say 'nana' say 'You want more banana'.
- Create simple art projects. Give your toddler crayons or put some finger paint on paper and let them explore by spreading it around and making dots. Hang it on the wall or refrigerator so they can see it.



- Play “Ready, Set, Go” outside, eg pull your child back in a swing. Say ‘Ready, Set’, then wait and say ‘Go’ when you push the swing.
- Ask them to help prepare for mealtimes by carrying things to the table, eg plastic cups or napkins. Thank them for helping.
- Allow them to eat as little or as much as they want at each meal. Toddlers don’t always eat the same amount or type of food each day. Offer healthy foods and let them decide if and how much they want to eat.
- Watch your child during playdates. Children this age play next to rather than with each other. They need your help to learn how to share, take turns and when possible use words to deal with conflicts.

What most children do by 2 ½ years

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Play next to other children and sometimes play with them.
- Show you what they can do by saying ‘Look at me!’.
- Follow simple instructions, eg helping to pick up toys when you say ‘It’s clean-up time’.

Language/Communication Milestones

- Say about 50 words.
- Say two or more words together with one action word, eg ‘Doggie run’.
- Name things in a book when you point and ask ‘What is this?’.
- Say words like “I”, “me” or “we”.

Cognitive Milestones (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Use things to pretend, eg feeding a block to a doll as if it was food.
- Show simple problem-solving skills, eg standing on a small stool to reach something.
- Follow two-step instructions, eg ‘Put the toy down and close the door’.
- Show they know at least one colour, eg pointing to a red crayon when you ask ‘Which one is red?’.

Movement/Physical Development Milestones

- Use hands to twist things, eg turning doorknobs or unscrewing lids.
- Take some clothes off by themselves, eg loose pants or an open jacket.
- Jump off the ground with both feet.
- Turn book pages one at a time when you read to them.

Children learn through play. Give them a variety of things to look at, touch and play with. Create opportunities to explore their world safely.

Help your toddler grow and learn

- Read to your child and visit the local library. This will help them enjoy reading and be ready to read when they are older.
- Ask simple questions about books and stories, eg “who?”, “what?” and “where?” questions.
- Older toddlers start learning about numbers. Support them by counting everyday things together, eg blocks, stairs, berries, crackers. Cheer or clap as they learn to reach bigger numbers, eg from 3 to 10 to 20.
- Play “Follow the Leader”. Start with an adult leader who can walk in a straight line, make turns, walk backwards, walk on tiptoes or run. They can change movements at any time and other players have to copy them. Once your child sees how it’s done they can lead.
- Encourage “free play” where your toddler can follow their interests, try new activities and use things in different ways.
- Play outside together, eg climb equipment in the park and run in safe areas.
- Let them play with other children, eg in the park or at a local play group. This helps learn the value of sharing and friendship.





Seek help if your child:

- loses skills they once had
- doesn't respond to sound or light
- doesn't use eye contact or interact with other children or adults
- is very stiff or floppy or shows a difference in how much they use their right and left sides.

If you are worried for any other reason talk to a health professional.

Getting help early can make a big difference.

You know your child best. Don't wait. Seek help early from the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) or your doctor or paediatrician. They can assure you all is well or get help for your child if they need it.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.

Want more information?

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100, 7 days, 7.15 am–9.15 pm
Advice on child health and parenting
After 9:15pm your call will go through to the national Healthdirect helpline

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri
for an appointment
Free service for children aged 0-5. Nurses can help with children's health, eating, sleeping and development www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

Early Years SA App

Information on child health, learning, development and wellbeing from birth to 5 years
www.education.sa.gov.au/early-years-app

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For further information on children's milestones
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html

Raising Children Network

Information on raising children, including child development and play
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Parenting SA

For other Parent Easy Guides including 'About babies', 'Learning to talk', 'Why stories are important', 'Developmental delay', 'Milestones for older babies', 'Milestones for 3-5 year olds', 'Growing and learning in the family' and 'Tantrums' www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Acknowledgement: The developmental milestones outlined in this Guide are sourced from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html



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Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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