

Resource from: [Milestones of Development](#)

Child development

Stages

Most of the behaviour that children display at each stage in their development is quite normal. Every child is unique and they all develop at their own pace. Keep your expectations of their behaviour and abilities realistic, use the developmental milestones below only as a guide so you have an idea of what to expect along your child's amazing growing journey. At all stages your child will need your unconditional love and support to help them along the way.

- the 'doing' stage
 - the 'thinking' stage
 - the stage of 'self awareness and imagination'
 - Normal but challenging behaviours
 - the stage for limits and structure
 - Teenagers
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Congratulations on being born!

The only way that new babies can communicate is by crying and some do it more than others. If your baby is unsettled, try to make them more settled by checking that their nappy is clean, that they are not too hot or too cold, that they are not hungry or that they do not have wind. Give your baby as much attention as you can but if you feel that something is not right, or if it gets too stressful, then seek advice from a friend or health professional straight away. Enjoy your baby, give them lots of cuddles and look out for that special first smile!

the 'doing' stage

Around this stage your child will begin to explore the world around them by touching, tasting, looking and listening. They will begin to develop their own initiative but will want you around to feel safe. They may become curious and easily distracted and their language skills will start to develop. They may want to try to feed themselves and become fussy about what they eat. Temper tantrums are a typical behaviour at this stage.

Tantrums are normal for this stage, it works better if you:

- ignore the tantrum as long as the child is safe
- try to anticipate the likely times these will occur
- distract the child if you can
- comfort the child if they will let you
- fit in shopping and other activities around your child's nap times
- be prepared for situations that you can't avoid – keep toys handy, try to give your child some attention even when you're busy.

You can help your child's development if you:

- provide a safe environment
- love and nurture them
- use specific praise – great climbing, good clapping, well done for sitting there
- expose them to a variety of experiences and places
- remember that most children eat what they need
- let them take as much time as they need to do things
- don't criticise or shame them
- enjoy what they can do and don't expect them to understand things they're not ready for

- put away precious objects and breakables. It's too early for them to learn not to touch when touching is how they learn at this stage.

Try to avoid conflicts over eating. If you're worried that your child is not eating enough at meal times, keep a supply of healthy snacks and fruit for when they are hungry. Don't expect good table manners from your child at this stage. They will spill food and it will be a while before their coordination is well enough developed to eat and drink without making a mess.

the 'thinking' stage

Around this stage your child will be testing their boundaries and beginning to understand the cause and effect of doing so. They will be able to follow simple commands and will be starting to think for themselves. They may want to have some say in what they dress in and eat and they will be learning to play with other children. Your child will be developing the concepts of past and future as well as expanding their knowledge of language and movement. They will also begin to develop a sense of humour.

It is typical of a child this stage to:

- play alongside, instead of with, other children
- resist any changes
- test behaviours – being able, but refusing, to follow simple commands
- develop definite ideas on what they will wear
- ask 'why?'
- enjoy rituals and stories
- want to eat when hungry instead of the set meal times
- eat messily and spill food.

You can help your child's development if you:

- are consistent and make a routine for the day
 - give lots of praise and cuddles
 - keep your praise specific so that your child recognises the behaviour you like
 - make commands clear and simple
 - encourage their independence in eating and dressing
 - answer their questions, even when it is the same one over and over again – this is how your child learns
 - offer simple choices – 'do you want the red or the blue one?'
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the stage of 'self awareness and imagination'

Around this stage your child will be very aware of themselves and their place in the world but will also enjoy using their imagination. Throughout this stage your child will be starting to assert their own identity and learning that behaviour has consequences and the effect that it has on others. They will begin to learn what is and is not socially acceptable behaviour and will be able to separate reality and fantasy. They will learn what they can and can't control, as well as continuing to develop their earlier abilities.

It is typical of a child this stage to:

- play in a fantasy world and create imaginary friends
- ask even more questions – as well as 'why' there's now 'how' and 'when'
- try out different identities
- set up power struggles and watch the power dynamics in family relationships
- begin to play cooperatively with others
- develop an interest in games and rules
- practise social skills.

You can help your child's development if you:

- encourage them in the new challenges they will face at this stage, such as kindergarten and school
- talk to them about feelings so they can learn to express and connect their feelings and thoughts

- answer their questions and give the right information about their bodies and the world around them
- praise good behaviour
- encourage their imagination but help them to separate fantasy and reality
- keep instructions clear and simple.

Normal but challenging behaviours

There may be some behaviour that you want to change. Always be consistent and give clear messages. Young children can be easily confused by change, support them to make these changes and don't punish them if they make mistakes. You can use 'time out' as a discipline by putting your child into another room where they are safe. Before you do this you must be certain that your child is old enough to understand why this is happening and you must ensure you keep the time reasonable. A good guide is one minute on their own for each year of the child's life. Sometimes what children need is 'time in' – some special time on their own with a parent or caregiver when you can do something that they enjoy and when you can comment on good behaviour. If they continue their bad behaviour tell the child that the special time is over and it can continue when they begin to behave better.

When you discipline your young child it helps if you remember that:

- this should be teaching and not punishment
- you may have to repeat that this behaviour is not OK over and over again
- your child needs to hear that it is the behaviour, not them, that you don't like

If your child is aggressive it helps if you:

- have a clear rule that violence or aggression isn't acceptable in your family or whānau (and ensure that adults follow this rule too)
- check out the TV programmes they're watching and monitor their viewing patterns and times
- never reward aggressive or violent behaviour – always have a negative consequence, such as time out or no TV
- encourage them to talk about things, not just hit out
- teach asking and negotiation and model these skills yourself
- praise the good things they do
- reward them for changes in their behaviour.

If you are worried about lies:

- remember that a child doesn't have the same idea of truth as an adult
- they may just be fantasising and talking about something they wish was true
- be truthful yourself – your child will pick up on any 'white lies' and not see any difference between these and a more serious kind
- reward them when they do tell the truth, even if it was something you didn't want to hear.

Many children wet the bed and some boys do take longer than is considered 'normal' to grow out of this. Never punish your child for wetting the bed. You can try rewards for dry nights but it is a developmental stage that most children will pass through – some just take longer than others. Get help if you are concerned.

If your child doesn't cooperate with your directions it helps if you:

- are telling and not asking them to do something
- give specific instructions
- are not giving them too many tasks at once
- don't get caught up in discussions or arguments about what you want the child to do.

Give a clear instruction

Wait 5 to 20 seconds for your child to cooperate

If they do:

Reward the good behaviour with positive attention

Give specific praise and be very enthusiastic

When your child cooperates regularly, acknowledge this with a 'thank you'

If they don't:

Repeat your instruction

If possible, make it firmer and shorter

If they cooperate the second time, praise this behaviour

If they don't cooperate, use a consequence, such as time out or turning off the TV

You can encourage your child to cooperate if you:

- add a reward to the instruction but give the instruction first – ‘put on your pyjamas and I’ll read you a story’
 - find out what they would prefer to be doing – if your child doesn’t want to eat their dinner, then suggest a bath or a game afterwards
 - give them simple tasks with a limited choice – ‘what will you put away, the cars or the blocks?’
 - help them with the things you want them to do – such as putting away the cars while they pack up their blocks.
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The stage for limits and structure

Your child needs to learn about limits and why we need them. They need to understand why your boundaries are relevant to them. At this stage your child will be learning to listen to get the information they need and learning to identify the difference between needs and wants. They will be checking out the family rules and learning the consequences of breaking them. They will be testing the family values and learning that there can be both disagreement and love in your family. They will also be learning about different boundaries and expectations outside the family, such as in school and clubs. They will begin to identify strongly with their own gender and learn about personal responsibility and self control.

It is typical of a child this stage to:

- ask a lot of question to get the information they need
- choose to play with other children of the same sex
- argue about and challenge parental values (especially in the older child)
- be moody (especially in the older child).

You can help your child’s development if you:

- give lots of love and protection
 - encourage them to do things their own way
 - support them in the skills they learn and the decisions they make
 - be clear about what you are responsible for and what you expect from them
 - set clear limits but keep some difference between what you’ll negotiate on and what is non-negotiable
 - let them experience consequences in a safe and protected environment
 - teach them problem-solving skills
 - let them know you still love them even when you disagree about things.
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Teenagers

Your child will make important transitions during their teenage years as they begin to develop from childhood to adulthood. They will begin a shift from following your rules to recognising their own values and will define themselves by what they feel and think rather than by other people’s opinions. They will also start the transition from living in a family to living independently out in the world.

It can be difficult keeping good lines of communication open with your teenager. Arguments can develop quickly and there can be a lot of tension in the household.

Remember that at whatever age your child is, they still need your love and understanding. As with every stage, you need to keep your expectations realistic and acknowledge the good things your child or young person does. It will help to communicate well with your teenager if you:

- stay calm, even when they are deliberately trying to anger you
- take time out for yourself, rather than giving in to your anger or trying to discuss something when you’re upset
- give them the opportunity to reply or participate in any discussion
- hear what they say
- keep arguments in a neutral place – respect the privacy of their room
- don’t put your teenager down or make fun of them
- regularly give them positive feedback

- avoid giving ultimatums and creating power struggles
- talk while you're doing something together rather than making a big deal out of it
- show your appreciation for their help in household chores
- give them a hug and tell them you love them
- choose your battles – let some things go.