
Introduction

Karen Petty, PhD

Benchmarks of development are important to all caregivers and families alike because they provide information that can help them both observe and chart a child's development over time. While environments, child-to-adult ratios, caregiving routines, and group size are important for young children in care, knowledge of and attention to children and their development are most important. This book provides descriptions of developmental milestones, which are behaviors exhibited by children (and observed by caregivers) at certain times during their development from infancy through early school age.

How to Use This Book

This book can be used as a caregiver's guide to the typical developmental milestones of children ages birth through eight years. This book is *not* a diagnostic tool or a remedy for children with developmental delays or differing abilities. The book is intended as a quick reference that can be used alone or in conjunction with the Developmental Milestones Observational Record, which can be downloaded from the Redleaf Press Web site (www.redleafpress.org). Type *developmental milestones* into the Search Catalog box, and follow the links.

Who Is This Book For?

Parents frequently ask, "How will I know if my baby is progressing normally?" or "Is my baby keeping up with other kids his age?" The more caregivers know about young children and their stages of development, the less anxious and better prepared they are to care for children at any age or stage. Caregivers of young children—teachers, child care providers, families, and friends—will benefit from this book because the valuable information it contains will help them understand and know when a young child may need special care or diagnostics. While no measure of development can be considered definitive, some typical milestones are achieved universally by most children at particular ages and stages. Knowing that children develop along a continuum that is unique to each individual child, caregivers can use these general milestones to identify when a child may be developing slower than average.

Why Study the Development of Children?

The more caregivers know about the children in their care, the better they will be able to provide appropriate experiences for them. Noticing behaviors such as an infant smiling when she hears a particular voice or a preschooler getting cranky each day after mealtime will give caregivers a sense of who the child really is. Small observances such as these further caregivers' knowledge of child development and their familiarity with and understanding of the children in their care.

The Caregiver and Development

To be a professional in the field of child development and the care of young children, an understanding of the children in care is crucial. Caregivers need to understand the domains of child development as well as the behaviors typical of children at a particular age. This book can be used as a source of information for families and others who care for children. As caregivers learn more and more about children and developmental milestones, their individual planning for each child will improve.

Diversity

Caregivers can make efforts to celebrate the diversity of children as members of a family unit and as individuals with specific characteristics that are all their own. Children are one-of-a-kind and unique in their own ways. They come from families who represent diverse cultures, languages, abilities, and experiences. It is the caregiver's job to learn about each child's background in order to know each child in a more sensitive and meaningful way.

Knowing the child means knowing the family, and connections to families can be made stronger and more meaningful when caregivers take the time to bring the diversity of families' lives into their own practice. After all, caregivers share the same goal with each family—for their child to succeed.

Domains of Development

There are many domains of development, but this book focuses on four:

- physical/motor development
- social/emotional development
- language development
- cognitive development

Each domain is important in its own right but also works in tandem with the others. Children do not function in a single domain at a time. As children carry out their daily tasks, they often work in several or all of the domains concurrently. The four domains listed above are addressed for each age and each developmental stage throughout this book. They can look dramatically different from one age to the next. For example, a child's vocabulary skills at one year are dramatically different from a child's vocabulary skills at eight years. The domains help categorize the observed behaviors and milestones.

Karen Petty, PhD, holds a master's degree in early childhood education and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction with emphases in early childhood and child development. She has over twenty years of experience teaching and caring for young children and conducting trainings and workshops. Dr. Petty is a consultant for military installation family member programs and is the author of *Deployment: Strategies for Working with Kids in Military Families*. She is an associate professor in early childhood development and education at Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas.