



Infant-Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN)



Proactive Strategies to Support Classroom Routines and Schedules: Understanding Developmental Milestones, Appropriate Practices, and Brain Basics

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DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Children typically develop in a predictable timeline and sequence in physical, emotional, social, and cognitive areas of development. While we know skills do not emerge at the same time for every child, there are general age ranges when we expect certain skills to emerge. We refer to these as *developmental milestones* or age-appropriate practices. Developmental milestones can help you begin to understand the child's current skills and what to expect next, helping you plan activities, routines, and schedules that will support the child as they work toward mastering higher-level skills. Understanding age-appropriate developmental milestones is an important first step when thinking about how to best support the routines and schedules in your classroom. However, it is important to note that there is variation in development between children, so care should be taken assessing the skills a child has already developed, compared with the skills listed for a particular age.

In addition to age-appropriate developmental milestones, developmentally appropriate practices that include individual-, and social or cultural-appropriateness must be considered when planning daily activities, routines, and schedules. Individual appropriateness emphasizes and values each child's uniqueness and respects diverse learning styles, personalities and intelligences. Social or cultural appropriateness requires an understanding and respect for the diversity of families and communities so that learning experiences are meaningful and relevant for children.

Along with developmental milestones and appropriate practices, early childhood professionals must have a basic understanding of the brain and how it works. The human brain is the only unfinished organ at birth, continuing to develop through adulthood. (Center on the Developing Child, 2018(a), Schiller, 2015). A young child's brain is most plastic, or flexible, during the first three years of life, forming more than 1,000,000 neural connections per second! (Center on the Developing Child, 2009). When we provide high quality environments that include rich activities, opportunities for

"Self-regulation has a foundational role in promoting wellbeing across the lifespan, including physical, emotional, social, and economic health and educational achievement. Self-regulation can be defined as the act of managing thoughts and feelings to enable goal-directed actions. This means, for instance, finding ways to cope with strong feelings so they don't become overwhelming; learning to focus and shift attention; and successfully controlling behaviors required to get along with others and work towards goals."

- Rosanbalm & Murray, 2018

practice and making mistakes, responsive caregiving, and consistent, predictable routines and schedules, we support and encourage children’s development of self-regulation. Stronger self-regulation has been shown to predict school performance, relationship building, and decreased behavior issues. (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2018)

Explore the following article to learn more about brain architecture and its role in future learning, behavior, and health. <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/InBrief-The-Science-of-Early-Childhood-Development2.pdf>

Explore the following article to learn more about promoting self-regulation for children birth to age five. <http://fpg.unc.edu/resources/promoting-self-regulation-first-five-years-practice-brief>

Explore the following article to learn more about executive function activities for 6- to 18-month-olds. <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-6-to-18-month-olds.pdf>

There are many wonderful resources for accessing developmental milestones. The Center for Disease Control’s “Learn the Signs, Act Early” resources can provide you with developmental milestones for children, ages birth to five. To access these milestones, go to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Learn the Signs Act Early website, found at https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/checklists/all_checklists.pdf

In addition to the developmental milestones, the “Learn the Signs, Act Early” website gives you access to free materials to order or download, a 1-hour training module for early care and education professionals, a Milestone Tracker app for parents and professionals, information on what to do if you are concerned about a child’s development, and many more resources on learning the signs of typical and atypical or delayed development.

As you examine the developmental milestones that most closely match with the children in your care, you will begin to see predictable patterns of development that may guide your construction and implementation of classroom routines and schedules.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE!

OPTION ONE: First, read through the vignette “All About Me – Adam” below. Next, download and print the “Your Child at 2 Years” developmental milestones checklist (page 13) from “Learn the Signs, Act Early” link above. Finally, check each milestone you believe Adam has mastered, based upon the information in the vignette. (Answer sheet in Section 5)

OPTION TWO: Complete the steps above for a child currently in your care.

All About Me! – Adam

Adam turned two-years-old two months ago and has been in Anna and Cristina's classroom for the last nine months. He is an easy-going child, often smiling and running to the door to greet other kids and teachers when they enter the room. The teachers have noticed Adam starting to interact with his peers more intentionally during play. Yesterday in dramatic play, he found a bottle buried in the bucket, handed the bottle and a baby to a peer and said, "Feed baby." After watching Adam stand on tip toe to stack seven blocks with another child (Look Ms. Tina! We made tower! It's soooo big!), Cristina brought paper and crayons over to the block area. "Can you draw the tower you just made with on this paper? Look, like this." Cristina started drawing lines on the paper, and the boys drew a couple of lines and then knocked the blocks over to build again.

Adam and Cristina spend time first thing in the morning reading books in the cozy area. He loves *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Big Red Barn, and Freight Train*. Cristina has been pausing at the end of a phrase and prompting Adam to finish it – which he has started to do. Adam likes to turn the pages, even when he's been asked to wait until the page is done, and point to and name the animals and items in the books. When he doesn't automatically point and name the animals or items, he is able to answer questions when Cristina points to them. The *Freight Train* book has been great to help him learn and name shapes and more colors.

Adam is always the first one to run out onto the playground! He is able to climb up the three stairs on the climber, holding onto a teacher's hand or the rail. Anna has spent time modeling for Adam kicking, throwing, and catching basketball-sized balls, and has noticed he tends to throw using his left hand more often than his right.

Adam really enjoys music and movement activities, "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" and "Jump Up and Down" being among his favorites. When all the kids gather together and sing the "Good morning song" and "Jump Up and Down", Adam joins in, singing the names of each child and copying the actions named in the songs.

Occasionally, when children get too close to him or when he has used his words and the other child doesn't comply with his request, Adam will scream and/or push and/or bite. The teachers have been very consistent in modeling words and phrases for all the children, "Tell him I don't like it when you take my toy, please give it back." The teachers have noticed Adam repeating some of these words in his interactions with peers, "That's mine!" "No." "Give it me!".

Adam is starting to pull his own pants down when it's time to use the toilet, though he still needs help to get them all the way down. With little reminders like, "Flush the toilet and wash your hands.", he sticks his hands in the water to wash and asks for soap and says "I make bubbles!". Anna has been working with Adam to use his foot to operate the pedal on the trash can, instead of his hand.